

Stage Struck ;

OR, THE

MYSTERIOUS ACTRESS

By M. J. Roy.

AUTHOR OF WALTER BROWNFIELD—THE HIRED GIRL—THE TEACHER'S MISTAKE, ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXIX. HORNE'S REVENGE.

Poor Seymour deserted by all his friends, even the false woman whom he had held out to the world as his wife, but who really was only a mistress, found himself firmly in the iron hands of the law.

Before proceeding further we deem it necessary to make a few trifling explanations. The news of the abduction, capture of Seymour and death of LaMorge spread to the city, and all the Seymour members took flight. They never even put in appearance on trial day for the recovery of our property, so we obtained what is known in law as a judgment of default against them.

With the return of the property, and having nearly all the money in our hands, we were urged upon to remain in the company and were assured of a successful career; but I had resolved to quit the stage and so had our star, who was still known by the theatre people as Nellie. Her father would have consented for her to remain an actress had it been her desire, but now her highest ambition was the quiet old farm house near Hampstead, in the State of Illinois. Its green pastures, groves of stately elms and many lowing herds, were a constant theme for conversation to her.

Horne was undetermined as to what his future would be; he was utterly and completely absorbed in the one thought of revenge against Seymour.

"I'll never rest content," said he one day to Charley Mitchell and myself, "until I see him safely behind the iron gate of the penitentiary."

"You are carrying your bitterness to too great an extent," said Charley.

"Have I, have we not all, had enough to stir to a fever the blood organs?" cried Horne in his most melodramatic manner. "Did not the scoundrel organize our company with and for the purpose of a cool, deliberate robbery? Did he not praise our talents as actors from day to day until he had us completely in his power, and then when he had the whip in hand sell us out and term us hoodlums. I'll yet scorn him behind the bars. When he first jerked me on the stage at Hampstead and termed me a hoodlum, I swore I'd be revenged and I will yet."

"Why Horne," said I, "I did not dream that you bore malice for so trifling a thing."

"I do though, and he shall have the full benefit of all I can do to convict him."

"Do not let your prejudice against him cause you to stretch the truth on the witness stand," I said.

"It will not, I will not. I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but I'll tell for all that there is in it," replied the Herculean actor.

"I thought from the slap you gave him, your wrath would be somewhat appeased," I said.

"That was an awful slap. It was the long pent up slap of ten months bursting all of a sudden like some terrific cataract and falling with the force of thunder. I felt easier for three days afterwards."

"But you seem to be swelling again," said Charley Mitchell.

"I am, and likely to burst if a chance does not soon present itself for me to get in something on the scoundrel."

It came in an exceeding short time, for the grand jury was already in session and they returned an indictment against Seymour for abduction and for an assault with intent to kill.

Mr. Connel, Alice, Horne and myself were the principal witnesses. The day of trial came and the great court room was crowded with eager spectators. A sensational criminal case is sure to command a full attendance.

The newspapers had been full of accounts of the tragedy resulting from an attempt on the part of a stage manager to abduct an actress. The affair had been so well advertised that the trial had a most excellent audience, so far as numbers were concerned.

"Witness take these seats," said the sheriff, pointing to a row of chairs to the right of the court, and we filed in and took our seats.

There was a slight commotion at the door and a murmur ran over the audience.

"Silence!" shouted the crier, and all became still.

The prisoner came forward between two deputy sheriffs. He wore a pair of handcuffs, and was rather haggard. His face was smooth shaven, save the jet black mustache, and he carried in his hand his once beautiful silk hat.

The prisoner was placed in the box, and the court formally opened.

"State against L. H. Seymour," cried the clerk.

"Bid the prisoner come forward," commanded the judge, in his most solemn manner.

Seymour stepped up in front of his honor, and the prosecutor was furnished with the indictment.

The complaint, charging the defendant with the abduction of one Alice Connel was read, and he entered a plea of not guilty.

"Are you ready for the prosecution?" asked the court of the State Attorney.

"Is the counsel ready for the defense?"

"We are, your honor," replied two portly lawyers, with bald heads and eye-glasses.

This occupied almost the entire forenoon. The court then took a recess until two o'clock. When next called, the jury filed out in their places, and the attorneys made their statements.

The statements were lengthy, and occupied the entire afternoon. Court then adjourned.

The next day I was the first witness sworn and put upon the stand.

I proceeded to tell what I knew, and the forenoon was consumed in the examination in chief, then an adjournment until the afternoon session, which was taken up in the cross examination of myself; as was also the forenoon of the next day.

Alice was next put upon the stand, and told a straightforward story, without any attempt to prevaricate. She underwent a most rigid cross examination, and at times I trembled lest she should break down; but she never once contradicted herself.

Then came Horne, who corroborated what we had said, so far as he knew, and he fully verified his statement that he would tell the truth and nothing else.

He showed considerable vindictiveness, which, without doubt, weakened the case for the prosecution. Then came Mr. Connel, who told his story in such a manner as to carry conviction with it. At the conclusion of his evidence, Mr. White, the attorney for the prosecution, announced that he now closed his case.

The witnesses for the defence, men who knew absolutely nothing about the case, were called and failed to undergo a cross examination.

The defendant's attorneys became desperate. They introduced various motions, which I did not understand, but which I knew availed them nothing.

The charge to the jury was lengthy, after which they retired, and it was some two or three hours before they returned a verdict which read:

"We, the jury, find the defendant guilty, as charged in the indictment."

JOHN BURGESS, Foreman.

"Good!" exclaimed Horne. "I will yet live to see the villain looking through gratings."

The court then fixed the sentence at five years in the penitentiary.

"My revenge will be complete," said Horne. "I'll yet see him looking through the gratings."

A motion for a new trial and an arrest of judgement was over ruled.

"When will that fellow be taken to the penitentiary?" asked Horne of a court bailiff.

"Next week," was the reply.

"Well, I want to go along. I'll pay my own expenses and guard him free of charge. If he attempts to 'escape' I'll give him another slap that will more than lay him out."

The bailiff told him he had better see the sheriff. Horne did so and was informed that his assistants would not be needed, but he might accompany them if he desired.

On the day set for conveying the convict from the jail to the penitentiary Horne was on hand and accompanied them.

He was at the elbow of Seymour when he stepped forward sullenly and registered his name on the prison register.

"You write a fair hand," said Horne in a cruel manner. "It seems to me I saw that same signature once to our articles of copartnership."

The convict looked sullen but made no reply. The warden reprimanded Horne for the remark.

He followed Seymour to his cell, and when he saw him safely locked in, dressed in a suit of striped clothes, he rattled the bars and cried:

"Caged, ha, ha, you are a pretty bird in that uniform. My revenge is complete at last. I see you looking through gratings. That is all I ask."

He was informed that such conduct would not be permitted in the prison, whereupon he left it, swearing upon a much slighter provocation he would slap every official in it, even if his father was included in the number.

CHAPTER XXX.

(CONCLUSION.)

"This whole affair has got to end my way after all!" said Charley Mitchell, entering the room one morning in which Alice—though I sometimes yet call her Nellie—and myself with George Wainwright and Rose Perry sat.

"What is your way Charley?" asked George.

"Why, you four are going to get married soon, the old Star Combination is on the eve of bursting up and you will quit the stage. Now all of that is not my plan exactly. In the first place I would like to have been the bridegroom to one of these girls myself, but that part I failed in, and I'm still willing to play low comedian or walking gentleman. But my plan as changed, revised annotated is that you four get married at once, and that our old company a sufficient portion of it hold together long enough to give you a benefit."

Dear old Charley, I remember him as though in were but yesterday. I saw him last summer. The theatre season was over and he came to our country residence for rest. It was the first time he had seen either of us for five years and he was delighted to behold us again. He spent a month at that quiet old farm house frolicking with our two babies, respectively three and one year old, and then returned to the stage. Charley loves the profession, is still single and though a good actor will never become a star. He is the only member of the original Star Combination that is on the boards today.

"George and I looked at our companions, as the mischievous Charley seated himself as though waiting their reply. But they only blushed and hung their heads.

"Well what say you Thorburg?" said George, after a moment's silence.

said George. "What do you say to it Rose, my dear?"

"Oh, quit teasing me that way," said Rose, pettishly. "Do just as you please."

"I've got the consent of my intended," said George, to me, "now try what luck you will have with yours."

"Would you care to go on the stage once more, Alice?" I asked.

"No, not if it is to be my farewell." "It will be."

"Then I will consent!" "I have the consent of mine," I said.

"Agreed, brother Mitchel, you will be accommodated," put in George.

"There is one thing now that I want to talk business about," said Charley.

"What business?" we both asked.

"The new theatre is completed and will be opened next week. I have it engaged for one week and I want as many of our old company as I can get. Felix Miller will be here, so will Atwell Ladue and their wives. I want you four to play the entire week; you must be married during the week and Saturday night the last appearance of the great star Nellie Cornell will be her benefit. Friday night will be the benefit of the next greatest lady star, Rose Perry."

We paused and again looked at our companions, but they were silent, and both blushed scarlet.

"Well," said George with his usual quiet humor, "what does my intended better half say to the proposition?"

"Oh, do hush and don't tease me," said Rose half pettishly. "Do just as you please," she finally added.

"Mine consents," said George. "Thorburg, try yours."

"What do you say, Nellie? I must call you Nellie for awhile yet any way."

"I don't care," she said with a sweet smile, "if you call me Nellie all the time, if you prefer it."

"Well, but do you consent to Charley's proposition?"

"That is rather sooner than I expected."

"Then you expected to go on the stage again?"

"No; sooner than we intended to—"

and she hesitated, her eyes drooped and she blushed deeply.

"Sooner than we intended to get married?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Not a bit too soon," put in the vehement Charley. "Delays are dangerous, and there is no need of putting this matter off; you might get married just to accommodate me."

"Well, what do you say?" asked George of his betrothed. "Shall we accommodate Brother Mitchell?"

"Oh, do hush—do just as you please I said, replied Rose."

"Mine consents, Thorburg. Try yours again," said George.

But with Nellie it was no such easy matter. She declared that she must consult her father first.

Charley ordered a carriage, and we five drove from the hotel to the palatial residence of Mr. Connel. The new found daughter had not as yet taken up her abode at the residence of her father, but was expecting to do so in a few days as soon as rooms could be fitted up for her.

Mr. Connel was an indulgent father, and I have since found him an indulgent father-in-law. He consented with considerable reluctance to his daughter again appearing on the stage. He said he could not refuse however, as it was to accommodate such a whole souled fellow as Charley Mitchell. As to the wedding, he thought it rather soon. Alice's rooms were not quite ready for her, and he desired her to be living at home when married. But Charley insisted that he could get a number of carpenters, paper hangers and glaziers and "whoop things up" in a week, so it would be ready in time, and the early marriage was only for his special accommodation, as he wanted to give the new married folks a benefit.

After weighing the matter for some time in his mind the old gentleman concluded that it could be arranged in time.

"Then it can be depended on that you four are to be married next week?" said Charley rising.

"Yes," replied Mr. Connel.

"All right," the theatre will open Monday—come round and I'll assign you, as I'm to play stage manager, poor Seymour cannot. Good day, I must go now, and he bowed to go.

George insisted that he return with them in the carriage. But no—there were some business arrangements to make in different parts of the city, and he preferred to walk.

Our double wedding was set for the following Tuesday evening just before going on the stage.

We had some family arrangements to talk over and we took this afternoon for it. It was arranged that Nellie was to remain at the hotel until Monday when her rooms would be ready for her.

After our marriage and the week on the stage we were to take a bridal tour through the Western and Southern States and Territories.

Then we were to locate in Illinois, occupying the large farm my betrothed had admired, with its groves of elm, my own happy childhood home, as a country seat in summer and have our city residence in Chicago.

Mr. Connel was to dispose of all his property and spend the remainder of his days with us; all of which arrangements has since been carried out.

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"I think we should have some respect for Charley's feelings."

"To be sure you should be willing to accommodate me!" put in Charley.

"It is but a very slight matter to you, and will be a great accommodation to me."

"It would be too bad not to accommodate our friend Charley."

The house was crowded the acting good and well applauded, Nellie, as usual, carrying off the palm.

The next evening while the audience was assembling in the theatre, our company assembled at a little church and the beautiful girl whom I had so long loved was made my wife, and George Wainwright and Rose Perry made one. At eight I was on the stage and George in the box slinging tickets as though nothing had happened.

The play was that of Ingomar, the Barbarian, and I had the part of Ingomar and my wife that of Parthenia. I know I never played a part so well in all my life and my wife never a better one.

"No thoroughfare was played on Friday for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. George Wainwright. The house was crowded and George, with his young and blushing wife, went on the stage and made a short speech of thanks.

He then informed them that the next night would be the farewell benefit of Nellie Cornell—that she would appear on that night for the last time on the stage.

The advertisement packed the house. The free list was suspended and every ticket sold for cash. The price was raised and still not an inch of standing room could be found from parquet to gallery. So dense was the crowd that the orchestra was almost suffocated.

No play in these days took so well as the French Spy. There was enough sensational and blood and thunder in it to suit the Western people. By special request we had selected the French Spy.

The acting I can say was never better by a troupe that night's ill be called amateur.

Charley Mitchell, with his wit as the droll young French volunteer, kept the audience in a roar of laughter. But my own sweet little wife in the costume of the Arab boy as a spy, was the general attraction.

The appearance of her shapely form on the stage was sure to be greeted with applause. As the poor boy among the savage Moors, she elicited the sympathy of all.

Sighs, sobs and cries went up from the audience, and shouts of joy when she gained an advantage in the great sword contest. The play was just drawing to a close. It had been arranged for me to thank the audience at the close, when George and wife my own sweet Nellie and myself, were to bid them farewell. The last scene in the drama, over the battle fought, Algiers taken, and the dead hurried from the field. I thanked the audience as I stood in costume, my wife, at my side in her garb as the Arab boy, George and Rose came forward. The audience understood all, and a shout went up from the vast throng. A shower of bouquets fell about us.

"Farewell!" we all uttered amid our tears. The audience kept up a continuous shouting.

"That ends just as I wanted it," said Charley Mitchell, as the great curtain descended between us and that sea of faces forever.

THE END

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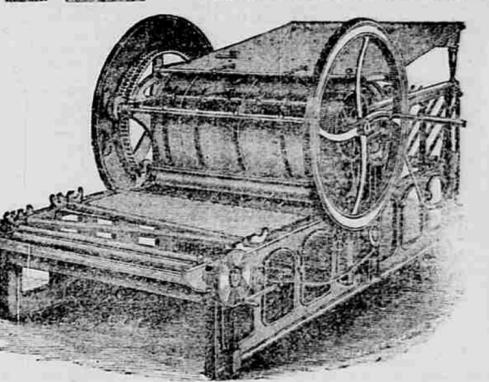
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