

THE DAILY BULLETIN.

MY MARRIAGE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PENELOPE," ETC.

(Continued from Last Sunday's Daily.)

There is not much to be seen at Crab's Rock—a tiny line of golden sand...

"Oh, I wish I had my sketch-book!" George says. "How pretty it is!"

"Mine is in the boat," Sir Jasper remarks quietly. "I took to sketching when I was abroad, and fortunately I brought it out to-day."

With a strange smile George takes the proffered book.

"Let it be peace for one day," he says in a low voice, and she gives a sudden brief look up into his face, and then sits down, the sketch-book on her lap.

"It is full of drawings. May we look at them?" she asks.

"Certainly; they are only scrawls," he replies.

Only scrawls! I see George's lip quiver as she hands over the scraps of drawings.

There are sketches of bits of scenery, views of places that he saw in his travels after he quarrelled with his love and went away to cure the pain at his heart by flying from place to place trying to forget.

George looks long and lingeringly at every scrap his hand had traced, and Sir Jasper and I talk of many things.

"What is your study?" he asks, and lays his hand on the book in my lap.

"The Lady of La Garraze," he says. "Mrs. Carstairs, to make our enjoyment perfect this hot afternoon you ought to read aloud to us."

"Will it if you like," I say smiling.

And so we settle ourselves in luxurious comfort on our tiny island, George busy with her pencil, Sir Jasper stretched lazily at full length, smoking, and I reading out the love-letters of Claude and Gertrude.

There is not a sound near but the wash of the water leaping on the yellow sand at our feet. An hour more perhaps passes away and we have not finished the story of the stricken Lady of Garraze.

A little wind has risen and flutters the pages of the book in his hand.

The boat is behind us, where the sand is smoothest, and where there are no rocks to impede landing. Before us lies the blue water, and the sunlit shore is beyond; and we never notice that the tide is creeping up inch by inch, every tiny wave a little nearer than the last, that slowly the fringe of sand is covered, and the washing waves have softly and gently lifted the light boat and drawn it back into the deep water.

A sudden puff of wind comes sighing over the sea. Sir Jasper looks up.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Mrs. Carstairs; but here comes the wind, and perhaps we ought to be moving."

"Oh, don't go just yet!" George says. "I must finish my sketch."

"Very well; we can stay a little longer," he assents.

Then he looks round and starts to his feet with a sudden exclamation. Half a dozen yards away our boat is rocking up and down.

"Can't we get back?" I say, and George and I laugh quite cheerfully at our adventure.

Sir Jasper makes one or two ineffectual attempts to look the boat back with his stick.

"Give me your parasol, Mrs. Carstairs," he says quickly; and trying it to his stick, he tries again to reach the boat. But in vain; the current is carrying it past the island; and we all look blankly into one another's faces.

"What a fool I was not to remark that the tide was coming in!" Sir Jasper says, looking angry and grave. "Miss Delacourt, you will have plenty of time to finish your sketch."

George suddenly turns white to the lips.

"Crab's Rock is covered at high water!" she says almost in a whisper.

We look at each other in silence. Her words carry their own meaning only too plainly. Sir Jasper speaks first.

"I cannot swim a stroke or else I could get the boat back easily enough. Come—don't get down-hearted; the tide won't be high for two good hours yet and a boat is sure to pass before that."

"Boats never pass here," George says gravely.

We look never far out to sea, but there is only the streak of blue on the horizon, and not a sail in sight.

"Somebody may see us from the shore," I suggest, with my heart thumping, as I see the water creeping up.

"Very few people pass this way," George says, shaking her head. "See how far away the boat is now—and the tide is rising very fast."

An idea rushes into my mind.

"Mr. Delacourt knows where we are—He will come for us."

George turns a little paler.

"Chris is dining out to-night at a place ten miles off. He will have started by this time."

Sir Jasper says not a word, but stands with compressed lips, looking at the little boat so far away on the shining waves.

"We must do something!" George exclaims a quiver of anxiety in her voice.

"What can we do?" Sir Jasper asks desperately. "Our only chance is a boat coming this way. Mrs. Carstairs, are you going too faint?"

"No," I answer, struggling with the horrid sick feeling of fear, and with a terrible fascination, watching the water creeping up. "Sir Jasper, couldn't we call out? Somebody might hear us."

He puts his hands together and shouts through them, loud and long, a cry that might awaken the dead; but the sound dies away and he repeats it, without a sound or sign coming in return to show that he has been heard.

"It is of no use. Perhaps a boat will come," George says, but her voice is dreadfully hopeless.

"We must be saved," I say, looking at my companions. "It can't be that we are to be drowned. Humphrey will come—some one must see us."

My hopeful words are spoken with a terrible sinking at the heart; and then an awful silence falls upon us. The sea and sky have changed suddenly, clouds blot out the sun, and the waves are foam-tipped now, and far away our little boat tosses up and down. Slowly the tide is rising. Only two hours more, and then—

An hour has passed away—sixty long minutes—and Crab's Rock is very small now. Not a sail in sight. We watch the rocky points running out into the sea, round which a boat might come; but there is not even one to be seen.

I sit with my face in my hands, in an awful speechless terror, thinking of death; and it cannot be very long now before the waves will wash me off into the deep cold

water. Will Humphrey be sorry, I wonder? Will he grieve long and sorely for the wife who was learning to love him?—Will he think of her always as sweet and lovely, the girl he loved so dearly? Poor Humphrey! Will he see me, I wonder, washed in dead at his feet in the white, mottled and blue ribbons that decked me so fairly this morning?

Ah, here will be an awful moment when I struggle for my warm young life, and sob out a dying cry before I go down, down into the depths and stillness below!

And Bee— I shiver all over as I think of her coming only to find I am dead. It will be full tide when Bee and Lena reach Carstairs, and I shall be no more then on the face of the earth, no more able to speak or think or move, never again able to tread the fair green earth. Ah, Heaven, and I am not fit to die!

I raise my woe-begone face and look at the other two, to see how they bear this death, this living death, that is stealing up inch by inch. They are standing side by side; her head is resting on his shoulder. Great sobs are shaking her from head to foot.

I bow my head and moan. They are friends at last. With death so near, how small all else appears!

"I loved you always," I hear her say through her tears, and he answers sadly:—"We can die together, my love; and it won't be very long now."

A long murmuring explanation follows, and the arms that lay once around his neck are around it again, the warm young arms that will be cold and lifeless soon.

I have no part and lot in this. They are together; I must die alone.

The waves are roaring round. One larger than the rest rushes up to my feet; and unconsciously I draw up my dress to keep it dry, and then burst out crying. I shall be wet all over soon enough—wet with the great hungry waves.

"I am afraid it is nearly all up with us," Sir Jasper says in a low hoarse voice.

I stagger to my feet and strain my eyes to take a long look around; but there is not a soul to help or save.

"Heaven help us!" I murmur.

Sir Jasper's face is as white as that of the poor trembling girl leaning against his breast.

"This is hard," he says brokenly.—"Would to Heaven it was over one way or the other!"

"Jasper, Jasper," wails George, "will it be a hard death? Will it be long?"

He bends his face over hers and makes no answer.

There is only a couple of yards of dry rock now; and every wave washes up a little nearer, a little closer.

George turns round a face that is white and distorted with anguish and terror.

"Save me, Jasper!" she gasps trembling.

"Dear love, it is so hard to die! Oh, Jasper, Jasper!"

"I have never cared so much to live," she says sadly, gathering her to her tightly.—"And then he turns to me, as I stand gazing with wide horror-filled eyes at the rising tide. "Have you too given up hope? Poor child, you are young to die!"

So we stand; and the waves come rushing up and washing over our feet. I shake all over as the first great wave breaks round me, and my white dress lies limp and sodden at my feet.

"Humphrey, Humphrey!" I cry. His name coming involuntary to my lips.

Oh, how he will grieve to think how I died—his wife, his little Madge, made up Madge! Scalding tears pour down like rain. Not a mile away the shore stretches, with the great white waves tumbling in—It seems ages and ages since we stood there. Then I was contented and happy, thinking of Bee and Lena coming; now I stand, a gasping stricken thing, waiting for the end.

CHAPTER XXIV.

No moan, no cry, and it is nearly over, the water washing about our feet. We two poor terrified women are quiet enough now, praying Heaven to have mercy and let us die soon. Sir Jasper holds his poor love tightly, and I cling to his other arm. Great sobs break from him, wring from him because of his sheer inability to help or save.

Only a few more minutes to live; and we cling to life, and gaze with hungry longing eyes at the land we shall never see again. George is half unconscious; her eyes are closed, and the only sign of life is a long shiver now and then.

"Heaven end it soon!" moans Sir Jasper, as a great wave makes us stagger and sway before we recover our footing again.

Blind and sick with terror, I seem to see nothing—hear only the surging sobbing waves that rise nearly to our knees.

"Seven o'clock!" says Sir Jasper, taking out his watch. "It is very nearly high water."

A great wave washes suddenly up to our waists, and a long wild cry breaks from me; for, oh, it is hard to die this slow and awful death! Sir Jasper and I look into each other's faces.

"Shall we end it at once," he gasps hoarsely, "and let Heaven have mercy on our souls? Death itself cannot be much worse than what we are enduring now?"

"No, no!" I cry, in wild awful horror, shrieking from the rising water with a terror that seemed to conceal my blood.

Humphrey, poor Humphrey! I seem to see him bowed and smitten, and Bee with pallid cheeks, and myself lying somewhere cold and drowned, my life choked out of me by the rising waves.

It is coming at last, the beginning of the end. I see a wall of water; I hear a man's hoarse cry of anguish, and then a louder cry—

"A sail, a sail!"

The great wave washes back again—Blind and wet, I cling to Sir Jasper, and hear him shout aloud, the despairing cry of a strong man facing death's agony. And then another wave washes over my shoulders, and I shriek as the blinding shower dashes back again; and I see—oh Heaven, it has come too late!—a boat plunging over the waves, and a voice cries out—

"Courage! We are saved!"

Saved! Lying at the bottom of the fishing boat, my head on a rough coat, I come back to life. We are flying before the wind, the big brown sail heeling over to water's edge, and the white waves seething and curling past. I see the rough kindly faces of the fishermen, and Sir Jasper, with George leaning against him, her white face upturned.

Is she dead? I suppose my eyes ask the unspoken question, for Sir Jasper answers—

"It can't be—it is impossible; her head was never under water once!"

He is rubbing her hands in his, and I struggle to my knees to help him. My teeth are chattering; I feel sick, dizzy and cold, and my thin dress clings wet and limp around me.

"How did they save us?" I say trembling with cold and excitement.

"They heard me shout," he replies; "and one noble fellow jumped in and held you up till the boat was got about. A minute later, and it would have been all over."

"Where are we going?" I ask, in blank bewilderment.

"To sea Crags," Sir Jasper answers. "They can't land on these rocks, Mrs. Car-

stairs. What can we do to bring her round?" Turning his piteous face to the sailors, he asks, "My men have you not a drop of spirits on board?"

After searching, one man produces a small black bottle containing whisky. Sir Jasper forces a little between George's closed lips, and makes me swallow some too. I feel better after it; and George opens her eyes wonderingly.

The sailors are very kind, and do their best to make us comfortable; and at last we see the twinkling lights of Sea Crags, a tiny fishing hamlet to which I once drove with Humphrey. Sir Jasper is whispering to George, and she has spoken once or twice in a tremulous voice.

Then the brown sail is hauled down, and kind rough arms lift us out, and we stand once more on the earth again, and see a crowd gathering, and hear eager offers of help. Willing hands lift George and carry her off, surrounded by eager sympathizing fisher-folk. They are very anxious to carry me too, but I rebel, and, gathering up my wet skirts, stagger weakly by Sir Jasper's side. A forlorn, miserable trio we are, though full of thankfulness for the lives that have been given back to us.

Sir Jasper is dreadfully anxious about George; but by-and-by, when we are warm and George and I clad in the Sunday garments of the fisherman's daughters, the color creeps back to her face, and she can laugh at our queer appearance. I smile a little too, as I sit on a low stool by the fire, and shake out my long brown locks to dry; but I am trembling still, and death seems hardly to have left our presence yet.

Sir Jasper comes in, attired strangely in queer uncouth garments; and the warm blood rushes to George's face as he bends over her, whispering and holding her hand in his.

"When can we get home?" I ask, feeling anxious to relieve the fright and anxiety there must be at home. We must have been missed by this time; and no doubt search is being made.

"I have managed to get a horse," says Sir Jasper, "and I will ride as fast as I can to Carstairs and let your husband know that you are safe. Then we can bring back the carriage for you. That is the best plan, I think."

"And mamma?" George puts in—"you will let her know won't you?"

"Of course. And now I'll be off. You feel all right now, George?" Sir Jasper says, bending over her again, for she is all his own now.

Then he goes out into the quiet twilight, and a few minutes after we hear the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping past. George sits and smiles into the fire, nursing over pleasant thoughts.

"I have not congratulated you," I say. "Oh, George, I am so glad!" And she looks up with tears in her eyes.

"I was happier to-day, even so near death, than I have been for a long, long time. Madge, he cared for me all the time and it did not seem so hard to die when I knew that."

We drink tea in the cottage, out of great heavy cups, and feel the blood coursing through our veins again; and we try not to think of those few awful moments when death was so very near.

Darkness has spread over the sky, and the waves are creeping back again; but I heed not the wash and murmur now.

George is half asleep in a large straw arm-chair, and she has her hand to her forehead, and her dark hair streaming over her shoulders. I look at her face, and it seems to me that her new happiness has blotted out the hard defiant expression that has rested there for so long; the firm sweet mouth is half smiling even in her sleep, and on her sweet fair brow rests no shadow of trouble—

—all is perfect peace at last. Death was a friend when he made those two one, after all the weary time of sadness and separation.

Through the still night-air comes the rattle and rumble of wheels. A carriage is being driven furiously through the little street. It pulls up suddenly.

"Madge, Madge!" cries a dear well-known voice that has the echo of old times in its tones, and Bee comes hurrying through the low door-way, and we cling closely to each other.

"I gasp—"Bee darling?" And I burst into a passionate fit of weeping, my arms around her neck.

"Oh, don't! Hush, Madge, you must not cry," she whispers in a fearful voice. "Dear, we have all been frightened; but it is over now."

I raise my face and see hers—the sweet dear face I thought I should never again see. And then my eyes stray to another figure—my husband, with longing eyes looking into mine. For one moment I have forgotten him; then I creep into the shelter of his arms and lean my face upon his breast. I feel him shiver all over as he gathers me tightly to him; and I know he cannot speak because his heart is too full.

"My wife!" is all he whispers, in a tremulous voice.

Happiness is a wonderful cure for all ills. Five minutes later we were looking at each with no tears—only smiles; and Sir Jasper and George look perfectly radiant. Humphrey has packed the carriage with shawls and rugs, and brought soup and wine and every imaginary thing, surely no shipwrecked mariners were ever married in such a fuss about it!

We drive home very silently in the darkness. Bee sits opposite to me with Sir Jasper, and her presence fills me with a great peace and happiness. George leans back in the corner, like myself, weary in body and mind. Humphrey is outside on the box; and when we reach home, he comes round and lifts me out, and carries me bodily up the steps and into the hall; for I am weak and shaky yet. Lena, Felicia Grant and Mrs. Delacourt stand waiting with pale anxious faces; and we are kissed and cried over again. Lena hangs over me, with her pretty childish face bearing the trace of tears; and Mrs. Delacourt looks as if the last few hours of anxiety have aged her ten years.

"Mamma, we are all safe; so you need not be frightened now," George says cheerfully.

Sir Jasper stands beside her, looking quite happy and quite unconscious of the absurd figure he makes in the loose hanging garments of the fisherman. Mrs. Delacourt looks from one to the other, divines that what was all wrong has become all right again, and she kisses George suddenly; and then, after a little more talk they drive away home; and with Bee and Lena, one at each side, I go slowly up stairs to get into my own clothes again.

"Humphrey was nearly out of his mind," says Lena. "Oh, Madge, when he met us at the station his face was as white as a sheet! He told us you were lost, and Miss Delacourt; and it seemed so strange and—"

"Ah, don't speak of it now!" I say, still seeming to feel the rush of the blinding waves. Tell me about home and mother and everybody."

And it is of the dear old home we are speaking when Humphrey comes in; and I am lying on the sofa in my room, clad in a white cashmere dressing-gown with pink ribbons, Bee and Lena sitting close beside me. They have got over their fright now, poor girls! Lena is raving about Carstairs—the old house has taken her fancy, and to-morrow and all the to-morrows to come speak of perfect happiness for her.

"My child, you look very tired," Humphrey says. "I don't like to see such pale cheeks."

He says little of what he has endured himself; but by-and-by he holds my hand in his, and in a low awestruck voice, I tell him how the mishap occurred, and speak of the fear and terror with lips that quiver at the recollection.

"My child!" he says. "And to think of my sitting here while you—"

His voice breaks; a tear—no mine—falls upon my face; and I know a little of what he went through when the life he loved was in danger—the young headless life that is so dear to him.

I think we get to know each other better in the long talk that follows; and our hearts have crept a little nearer when, with a long kiss, I whisper his name with a love and tenderness that have come newly to my lips. Out of death the dawn of a new love is springing; and it is with a sense of great rest and contentment that I feel my hand in his. Can it be that I am getting to care for my husband at last?

CHAPTER XXV.

Six long hot days go by, and our adventure on Crab's Rock has become a thing of the past. People can talk of something else now, and we are no longer objects of curiosity. The surging of the rising waves has ceased to echo and re-echo through my brain. I can sleep now without awakening almost every minute from dreams in which the whole awful scene reappears with vivid reality. Humphrey is at last assured that no ill-effects are going to follow from the cold and wetting; and Bee, Lena, and I are as happy as the days are long.

From early morn till dewy eve we three are inseparable. Felicia spends the long hot days studying, as if she was preparing for a competitive examination; and no persuasion can induce her to join us in walks or drives. I think she feels her brother's loss too keenly to care to go out into the world again—the world that is carefree and gay; so the long days pass like a golden dream, and I am as light-hearted as the madcap Madge of long ago.

"Humphrey," I say to my husband one day, slipping my hand into his of my own accord. "I am glad I married you; and I think—yes, I know that I am quite happy now."

"Quite happy?" he repeats, a fond smile in his eyes. "Heaven keep you happy all ways, dear!"

"May we have a picnic to-morrow," I say looking up into his face—just a small picnic to the Glen—ourselves and the Delacourts?"

"Settle anything you like, child," he answers; and then more gravely, "I like to see you bright and happy, dear. There was a time when I thought my wife would never take an interest in anything again."

Ah, full well I remember the time when I was freshly awakened to the knowledge that while I had cut myself adrift from the old life I had no interest in the new! The remembrance of it shadows me now for a second, and then I laugh gleefully.

"That was when I thought you were too tall, and had an objection to your beard?"

"And had too much money," he says smiling—"and when a certain little lady hurt me every hour in the day by refusing to spend it!"

"I don't trouble you much that way now, Humphrey," I answer. "I am sure you have found out that keeping a wife is a very expensive amusement."

"Very, especially when she grows prettier every day"—catching my hands and looking down into my face. "Little sweet-heart, did ever man worship such blue eyes as thine?"

"Nonsense!" I cry, laughing and letting my eyelids fall over smiling eyes. "We are old married people, Humphrey, and ought not to talk nonsense."

"I like to see you bluish," he persists, "and to make the dimples come, Madge—tell me, do you like your husband better now than on the day you were married?"

"A thousand times better," I answer, with a gay little smile and a fleeting look into his passionate gray eyes. "For I did not like you at all then, and I do now—a little."

But the qualified admission pleases him; and I begin to believe that a husband is not such a bad thing after all. I suppose I have become used to him at last.

"George is going to be married in a month," I say next; "and I am very glad. She is so happy now; and I am sure Sir Jasper is a different being."

Then I catch a quizzical gleam in Humphrey's eyes, and I know that he is laughing at me, because I have changed another of my opinions.

"It is now to hear you say that you are glad at a wedding," he says miffedly.—"I shall expect you to announce your partiality for beards next."

"Never!" I cry, and dart away between the standard-bearers to Bee, who comes smiling down the gravel path, her bright face looking sweet and winsome in the sunshine, a red rose in her hair and another at her throat.

Bee always looks picturesque and gipsy-like, and Lena would sacrifice everything to be fashionably dressed and have an appearance of chic.

"My love is like a red, red rose," sings Bee in her low rich voice. "Oh, Madge, what a glorious day this is!"

"Yes; and we are going to have a picnic to-morrow. Come and plan it, Bee."

Lena comes hastening over the closely-clipped lawn.

"Madge," she cries, "the Delacourts are here!"

So we all go together into the long cool drawing-room where George and Chris stand talking to Felicia, who for a wonder has left her work for to-day.

George is dressed in soft creamy muslin, with lace at the throat and wrists. Sir Jasper's love is a true woman after all; with the reconciliation all the fastness has disappeared, and even in dress his wishes are her law now. The old reckless George Delacourt who cared for no one's opinion, is very womanly now, with only one desire, to look fair in her lover's eyes. It is a new idea to me, who have never dressed to please any one in my life but myself; but I like George the better for it, and it is only right that she should please Sir Jasper in all things now. On her finger flashes an engagement ring. I catch her often looking at it with shy pleasure, and I know that to her Crab's Rock has proved a very blessed spot indeed.

George enters cheerfully into the plan for the picnic, and Chris assents with lazy good-humor. I see him smiling at Bee's radiant delight, and her fresh naive way of expressing it. They stand in the deep window side by side, a stanting sunbeam catches the blood-red rose at Bee's white throat, and tenderly touches the sweet arch face and glorious eyes. Chris is talking to Bee as he has been seldom seen to talk to any lady; but then she is such a child that he could not be shy with her.

As they stand together, and I see his shapely golden head bending to answer the laughter in her eyes, a thought dies into my mind, and I wish that Chris Delacourt would get to care for Bee, and she for him.

Continued next Sunday.

St. Jacobs Oil advertisement with image of a man carrying a large fish on his back.

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