

### Sybil's Elopement.

BY K. T.

#### CHAPTER II.—Continued.

The woman glanced curiously at him. "No," she answered curtly. "Maggie hasn't been herself these last few days. She made everything ready for you, and when it was done she shut herself up in her attic; and I couldn't persuade her to eat or drink, though she has scarcely touched food since the night your letter came."

If there was any reproach conveyed in these words Roderick did not heed it.

His whole attention was given now to Sybil. He had taken off her cloak, and, wheeling one of the big chairs up to the table, he put her tenderly in it.

"We are half-furnished!" he said laughing, his full deep voice richer for the tone of triumph in it. "I do not think we shall make much of a feast off Maggie's flowers. What have you for us, Mrs. Relmon?"

The woman hurried away, and presently returned with some cold chicken, a dish of fruit, and some home-made wine.

Worn out with the suspense and misery she had endured, Sybil thought the cottage a delightful haven, and she was quite satisfied to lean back in her chair while Roderick waited on her, soothing and coaxing her, till a gleam of the old sunny light returned to her eyes.

"You do not regret this step yet?" he whispered, when he saw how completely every trace of her tears had disappeared.

She slipped her hand softly in his broad palm, and rested her head half shyly against his shoulder.

"Roderick, if I had to make the choice a hundred times, it would always be the same. I love you, and it is the love that guides me to you. A thousand tortures should not keep me from you!"

He pressed her face closer against his breast, and kissed her.

"My darling, when you talk like that, I do feel I have sinned in letting you follow me."

"It would have been most cruel to have left me," she answered softly. "If anything were to part us I should go mad—or die. They will forgive me at home when I go back to them," she added wistfully. "It is only leaving them for a little while; but with you, the separation would have been for ever!"

They talked on until the meal was over; then leaving Sybil to the care of Mrs. Relmon, he left the cottage, promising to return soon after sunrise.

"It will only be for a few hours," he said at parting. "Rest, darling, and let your thoughts come to me while you sleep."

Sybil watched him with passionate yearning eyes, straining for a last look at his bronzed handsome face, as he passed out into the shadow.

Mrs. Relmon did not give her time to reflect over his absence.

Taking a candle from the side-board, she led the girl up a narrow staircase into a quaint little bed-chamber, sweet with the odor of roses, and Sybil was glad to undress and nestle down in the white-curtained bed prepared for her.

Overcome with weariness, she sank into dreamless sleep, her hands folded outside the coverlet, her pale face, fair as a pearl, in its setting of gold-bright hair.

The hot sunlight was blazing into the room when she awoke.

A soft knock on the door made her sit up, and only half remembering why she was in this strange room, she called faintly for the one who waited to enter.

As the door glided open, she expected to see the woman who had received them on the previous night. Instead, she saw before her a young girl, dark and gipsy-like in her appearance, with great eyes full of frightened wild misery.

She gave Sybil one eager look, then her gaze drooped, and she pressed her lips convulsively together.

"He has told me to be your servant," she muttered, without lifting her head.

"I shall be very glad to have you," Sybil answered carelessly, too preoccupied with her own thoughts to notice anything strange in the girl's manner. "Can I have those jugs filled with fresh water. What is your name?"

"Maggie," the girl replied, taking the jugs in her hands.

Without waiting to exchange another word, she hurried downstairs, passing out into the garden to draw the water from the well.

"She is like a lily," she thought, slowly turning the heavy handle, while two drops glistened on her lashes and fell down on the rough edge of the well. "She must be a great lady; I ought to be proud to let her take my place—to give her my love. No, no; it was not given!"

A step sounded on the gravel-path just behind her, and with a start she looked and saw Roderick Kemp.

"Busy, Maggie?" he asked, leaning lazily against an old stone wall, while he watched her toil with the rusty chains. "That work is not fit for you; why don't you let somebody else draw the water?"

"You used to help me once," Maggie said, lifting her eyes for a moment to his face.

"Used I?" he questioned, without offering to help her.

"Yes."

"I think you must be dreaming, Mag-

gie," he said with calm good humor.

She shook her head, a sudden bitterness scorching her eyes.

"The time for dreaming is over. Why did you ever tell me that you loved me?"

He shrugged his shoulders, a satisfied smile crossing his features.

"Those words are best forgotten," he replied with careless earnestness. "Be a good sensible little girl, Maggie, and don't think anything about the past. I could never have been to you other than I am now."

"As you like," the girl muttered bitterly. "I hope you will be true to your new love."

"I hope I shall," he answered contentedly.

The careless irony of his tones probed all the fiercest feelings in her heart, and, tossing the dark hair back from her face, she fastened upon him a look of savage scorn—of watchful vindictive mistrust.

"You are cruel—you are false—you are not worthy the trust placed so blindly in you!" she exclaimed through her clenched teeth. "You taught me to have faith in you—to worship you as a being above all living men, and then you mocked me for the love that drove such agony into my soul—that quenched all light from my life when you were absent. Yet as great, as entire as my love then, as great my hatred now. It may be that you love the bride you have brought to our home. Then I could have reason to forgive your forgetfulness of me; but if you take love, giving none in return—if you again seek to break a heart full of trust for you—take heed, Roderick, for you in your turn shall suffer! I will watch, and if you prove yourself false to her—I will kill you!"

Her sudden passion roused a sense of uneasiness in his breast, but instantly he relieved himself of the oppression, and laughingly shook in her face a handful of silvery dust he had scraped from the stone edge of the well.

"You gipsy! What evil prophecy have you been conjuring up for me? There—run and try to remember I am not one of your wild race."

He turned and strode lazily toward the shady unkept pathways, and Maggie, bending to her toil, carried the water up to Sybil's room.

Sybil dismissed her with a rather absent "Thank you," and hurried through her toilette, unaided.

Was this her wedding-day? She heard Roderick's voice in the garden beneath her window, and a strange timorous thrill ran through her as she listened to the rich powerful tones.

He was singing snatches from a serenade and the soft passionate refrain seemed to touch her soul with sweet meaning.

He was calling her away—bidding her hasten to his heart—reminding her that she was his bride—his life's fairest love.

Her lips parted with a smile, and brushing her hair into a shining coil, she gathered a spray of half-blown roses from the window, and fastened them in her dress as she descended the stairs.

Roderick greeted her tenderly, and led her to the table, where a dainty breakfast was prepared—such a breakfast as might have been served in the elegant morning-rooms of Forest Court.

Roderick was careful to confine their conversation to the present, that she should not be troubled with thoughts of the home she had left, and Sybil was satisfied to trust all to him, to let her fate be governed by his will—his love.

After breakfast, he gave her her hat, and throwing the cloak in which she had made her escape over his arm, he took her across the flower-bordered lane down to the river where the boat was moored.

He paused before he placed her in the little craft.

"I will give you your choice once more," he said, drawing back a few paces from her, and regarding her earnestly; "is it your wish—is it for your happiness that we go on? Do not be afraid to speak," he added, with an effort framing the words; "I would rather bear the shock now—I would rather make any sacrifice than urge you to a step you might regret. Had I wealth on my side, darling, I would not hesitate, but it seems that I am asking too much."

Sybil put her hands gently in his, full of admiration for the instinct she thought had prompted the words.

"I have given myself to you," she murmured; "if you do not love me, leave me. You know my happiness is only with you."

"My own sweet bride!" he exclaimed, "soon I shall be able to prove that your choice is not as bad as the world would believe. I am Lord Wolverton's nephew, his nearest relative, and though through a quarrel he has disowned me, it is impossible for his anger to last. His ill-will has done me at least one good turn—it has won me a wife entirely on my own merit."

Sybil looked at him with glad reproach. "Why didn't you tell me this at home?" she asked, her sweet face tremulous with pleasure. "Everything would have been so different."

A glance at Roderick's lowering brow silenced her.

"I have told you my name, because it would not be fair now to withhold any confidences," he said almost sternly; "yet there are reasons why I should keep

my identity a secret till my uncle thinks fit to acknowledge me. Not even your parents must know of what race I come."

Sybil felt a keen disappointment. It was hard he should have borne all those undeserved insults, when, by a single word, he could have proved himself more than worthy of her hand.

For herself she did not care.

No matter what his position, what his birth, he would always be the same to her handsome, fascinating—one whom she would ever be proud to love.

Every arrangement had been made for their marriage, and half an hour later she stood by his side in an old church, half buried in shining green walls of overgrown ivy.

It was a strange wedding—strange for the future Lord of Wolverton, and the beautiful girl who had been reared in the midst of wealth.

Yet neither of them seemed to regret the poverty in which they had sealed their fate. Sybil felt sure that forgiveness awaited her whenever she turned her face homeward—and who could convince them that Roderick was hopelessly disinherited?

Perhaps he knew how his fortune was balanced, for since he had mentioned his uncle's name, there was a restless gleam in his eyes, and no immediate plans were made but what could be formed out of Sybil's money.

#### CHAPTER III.

Two weeks later, Sybil returned to Forest Court, her happiness incomplete, because peace had not yet been made with those who, before Roderick's coming, had been loved best.

Her store of money was nearly at an end, and Roderick had eyed her few childish trinkets impatiently.

As far as her comfort was concerned, she would have been content to live under a thatched roof on wild fruit and a crust of new bread.

Roderick seemed to grow angry at the thought of the hardship.

"You are an heiress in your own right," he told her. "Your parents need give you nothing; but they dare not keep you from what is your own."

She did not speak again of the privation she could so easily bear with him.

His words had filled her with a vague uneasiness, a sort of dumb fear that Roderick would find no happiness with her if she should be long penniless.

More than once this thought struck her with a sharp force, and her young face grew white and careworn under the new anxiety preying upon her.

Never had her father's house looked as sombre and forbidding as it did to-day.

Only two weeks absent, and how everything had changed! It all seemed so grim, so silent, the white walls piled, like a huge tomb, amid the dense growth of forest.

What had given the place this strange gloom? Why were the blinds tightly drawn over the closed windows?

She stopped breathlessly, and caught Roderick's hand in an icy clasp.

"The house is in mourning," she exclaimed faintly. "Oh, Roderick, what does it mean?"

A sudden terror seized her, and breaking away from him, she rushed towards one of the doors through which she had been used to enter from the grounds.

It was fast locked, and scarcely able to repress a cry, she ran round to the principal entrance and pulled the bell with feverish haste.

She heard the heavy bolts drawn slowly back, and presently the door was opened.

Without any regard to ceremony, she would have slipped by the servant and have gone in search of those she had fled from.

Something in the man's rigid look, something in the silence of the great hall, arrested her, and she stood like one who had received a blow.

"Do you not know me?" she asked vaguely, a convulsive smile trembling across her white lips. "Am I so much changed? Go to Sir Maurice and tell him his daughter has returned."

Even then she would have dashed into the hall, but the man's form, immovable as granite, obstructed her way.

"My orders are to announce to all that the daughter of this house is dead," he said mechanically.

"Dead?" Sybil echoed, putting her hand up to her head. "I am not dead! Stand away, and let me pass. This mockery will drive me mad!"

Still the man did not move, except to half shut the door, keeping his hand firmly on the ponderous handle.

"I only obey Sir Maurice's orders," he muttered gruffly. "Whoever calls herself his daughter must not enter his house."

The door closed with a dull sound, and, too dazed to act for herself, Sybil leaned against one of the stone columns, and waited for Roderick to overtake her.

"Is this how you are received?" he exclaimed, with suppressed fierceness, as soon as he had reached her side. "They shall give me a different answer."

He wrenched the bell savagely and the door was once more opened.

A fiery glance from Roderick scared the butler into respect, notwithstanding the duty he had to perform.

Instantly recognizing Roderick, he handed him a note.

"Sir Maurice left this to be delivered to you if you should call," he said quietly.

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To the Sheriff of the County of Kent or any Constable within the said County—  
Greeting—  
Whereas Isaac B. Humphrey and Matthew T. Glenn, executors of the last will and testament of Duncan McDonald, late of the Parish of Harcourt, in the said County of Kent, deceased, hath prayed that the heirs and all parties interested in said estate, may appear before me to attend the passing of the final accounts of the said estate,  
You are therefore required to cite the said heirs and all others interested to appear before me at a Court of Probate to be holden at Buctouche within and for the said County on Thursday, the 10th day of September next at 11 o'clock in the forenoon at my office in Buctouche to attend the passing and allowing of said accounts.  
Given under my hand, and the seal of the said Court, the eighth day of August, A. D. 1891.  
(Signed) HENRY H. JAMES,  
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