

A Mad Love.

By the author of "Lover and Lord."

CHAPTER XVI.

The marriage morning broke clear and cloudless—all that a wedding day should, all that an October day can be.

By Mr. and Mrs. Medwin's wish—a wish that Ethel warmly seconded—the wedding was to be as quiet and unostentatious as it was possible for that of the master of Dareholme to be. The guests invited were few in number, and all close family friends; and those chiefly interested in the ceremony cherished a hope that the onlookers would be confined to the near neighbors whose presence on such an occasion was inevitable.

But the hope was a vain one; the busy tongue of local gossip had spread the tale about and given place and date; consequently church and meadow, and avenue were crowded as they had never been crowded yet. In any circumstances Sir Bruce Dare's marriage would have been an interesting event in the county; as it was, it was the last scene of a thrilling melodrama, the last chapter of a soul-stirring romance.

The gossips had the story of the second wooing that was to end happily to-day, not with absolute accuracy, but still with a tolerable approach to truth, and they discussed it with ever-growing gusto, as they crowded together in the church.

"He had made a vow never to love another," one woman assured an admiring coterie, "and he kept it for seven years; though of course Sir Bruce Dare might have had his pick of the peerage, and all the beauties of the day. But, when he came down to the old place, and saw Miss Ross-Trevor, who, they say, is just her dead cousin come to life again—"

"And so she is," another broke in eagerly, and with all the authority of superior knowledge. "I have seen them both and I know. Only Miss Ethel has more life and brightness, as one may say."

"By the way," an old man put in dryly, "did you hear the bell tolling not an hour ago! I don't suppose the sound reached Dareholme, but it must have been rare hearing for the bride."

"Tolling—no! Who is dead?" "Martha Jennings at the 'Dolphin.' They say Parson Challis wanted them not to toll till the wedding was over, because of the bad omen like. But Peter Jennings he's a rare Radical, and will not give way to no one, so he got his right."

And now the carriages came rolling up and the buzz of conversation yielded for the moment to the intense interest of watching Lady Dare and Crystal Joyce were among the first to arrive; then came Bruce and Ronald Dare, the former looking so radiant, the latter so pale and troubled, that the gossips decidedly had reversed the usual rôles of bridegroom and best man.

"One would think Captain Dare was the victim—not Sir Bruce—and just look how his eyes wander over to Miss Medwin's tomb, just as though he expected her to rise up and forbid the marriage," one of the women whispered excitedly. "Ah, poor girl, she must be in all their thoughts; but most of all, one would think, in the bridegroom's to-day!"

If it was so, if the dark and tragic past held any place in Bruce Dare's memory, as he stood at the altar-rails, the observed of all observers, in the absence of the bride, his countenance gave no clue to his thoughts.

The bride-maids, with Edith Challis at their head, gathered in the ivy-grown porch, and looked very pretty in their cream-colored skirts, and with their hats and jackets of cardinal plush. The majestic prelude to the "Wedding March" pealed out from the organ, there was a little buzz of expectation, and then Mr. Medwin walked up the aisle with the bride leaning on his arm and the bride-maids in a picturesque queue behind him.

Bruce took an involuntary step forward, his eyes bright with joy but Ronald touched his arm with a slight restraining gesture, and he drew back as suddenly, not venturing even to glance toward Ethel again, until she stood by his side.

She was very pale, paler than it is the bride's prescriptive right to be, so pale that her black hair and lashes looked blacker still by contrast with her ivory-white skin, but perfectly self-possessed; the pretty curved lips had a sweet gravity, and the deep violet eyes a look of resolute calm. As she stood in the sunlight, white-robed and crowned with flowers, she looked, Ronald Dare thought, with a little pang at his honest aching heart, less like a bride about to be united to the man who had won her whole heart than a novice bidding the world farewell.

Mr. Challis opened his book, but paused before the first words of the service had crossed his lips; for at that moment a train that ran on the rails close by the church-yard rattled noisily by, and the echoes evoked would have drowned his suave tones.

Silence restored, he read through the exhortation with impressive slowness, feeling that this was a ceremony and an audience upon which no elocutionary display would be wasted, and had just reached that culminating point in which, turning

to the bridegroom, he addressed him with the solemn words, "Bruce Dare, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?"—when a man, breathless with haste, with the perspiration pouring down his pale, excited face, rushed up the aisle, and, almost thrusting himself between the half-wedded pair, gasped out—

"Stop—stop in Heaven's name! The marriage can not go on!"

In an instant all was confusion and dismay; not one ear in fifty caught that hurried broken utterance, but all knew that an interruption to the ceremony had occurred. All saw the lividness of Bruce Dare's face, and the quick clasp in which his cousin held him. Ethel's face was hidden by her veil and by the women who pressed round her, but it could be seen that she still stood erect, and no cry was heard from her resolute lips.

"This is some madman," said the rector sternly; but there was a curious quaver in his voice. Such an interruption might have been possible at a poor parishioner's wedding, though in his long clerical experience none such had ever occurred; but it was alike incomprehensible and incongruous at Sir Bruce Dare's. "This is some madman," he repeated vaguely; and the new-comer answered, in a quieter and intensely earnest tone—

"I am not mad—tell them so, Dare—and tell them that you at least guess my right to interfere."

Ronald Dare grew horribly pale, and his lips twitched convulsively. He glanced at Bruce, who was as familiar as himself with the intruder's features, and who had certainly at least an equal right to interfere, but Bruce's eyes were fixed so leniently on the ground; he neither stirred nor spoke, and in that helpless silence Ronald read a dreadful confirmation of his worst fears. He dared not look at Ethel; he turned to the half-angry and half-frightened clergyman, and said, with evident effort—

"This is Doctor Clayden, a friend of Sir Bruce Dare's, and my own. He would not interrupt without sufficient cause."

Mr. Challis bowed, and, closing the book, prepared to lead the way to the vestry, in which matters might, he thought be more decorously explained.

But with a fierce cry, never to be forgotten by those who heard it, Bruce suddenly shook off his lethargy, broke from his cousin's strong clasp, and, seizing the pale girl beside him, dragged her fiercely back to the altar steps.

"Marry first and explain after!" he cried, with a wild laugh. "Nothing shall come between us, Ethel—nothing but death. You are here to perform the duties of your office, sir; marry us at once."

And, before the horrified and trembling clergyman could interrupt him, he went on, in a feverish, reckless, half-chant, with the words of the service, where the other had left them incomplete, still holding the half-fainting girl in an unrelaxing grasp.

By this time the terror and confusion had become indescribable. Ronald and Mr. Medwin tried to draw Ethel away, but Bruce held her fast, until, gliding from the hysterical crowd of women about her, Crystal Joyce, looking more wan and shadowy than ever, but with a strange light in her large eyes, came up on the other, and laid her cold thin hand upon his wrist.

"Bruce," she said, with such passionate entreaty in her tone as touched all hearts even then strangely—"Bruce, dear Bruce, come away."

He turned with a strange mechanical obedience, and looked into her face with a bewildered stare. For a second it seemed as though he meant to follow her with the unquestioning docility of a child; but suddenly the bewilderment passed away, the eyes gleamed and darkened with a very tempest of passion, and, flinging her hand furiously aside, he cried in a dull choked voice—

"So it was you! So you came back for this! You have told all at last!"

"No, no," she broke in eagerly, looking round fearfully! "I have told nothing; nothing will be known if you do not speak. Oh, Bruce, say nothing, as you value your life!"

"My life!" he repeated, with mockery in his eyes, and in the laugh that echoed jarringly and discordantly through the church. "That is a prize to cling to, since they are taking Ethel from me! You shall see how I value that. Ladies and gentlemen"—he stood on the raised steps of the altar, looking down at the sea of white faces with a curious mocking brightness in his eyes—"you have heard Doctor Clayden. Listen now to me, and learn the real 'just cause and impediment' to this marriage."

"No—no!" Crystal clung about him and tried to stifle the words upon his lips—her screams of agony rang piercingly through the building. "Bruce, you must not—you shall not! Mr. Challis, Ronald, they must not listen to him—he is mad—"

"Mad!" Bruce echoed, pushing her roughly away, and looking round with glittering eyes. "Yes, that is it—I am mad—so mad that seven years ago I murdered Florence Medwin. So mad that I thought her blood would never cry for vengeance as it is crying now!"

Ronald was the first to follow in his track, and reached the steps almost as soon as he; but he came too late. Long afterward he wondered, with a dull pang at his heart, whether his presence had not accelerated the catastrophe he shuddered to recall.

As the two young men appeared almost simultaneously in the porch, the Dareholme carriage drove up rapidly, and Bruce, with a wild unearthly laugh, ran straight out into its path.

The coachman made a well-nigh superhuman effort to pull up, and Captain Dare sprang to the horses' heads. But both were too late. The carriage pole struck the flying figure, the horses' feet came sharply down, and, before a warning cry could break from the lips of those who saw his peril, Bruce Dare lay in the dust, bruised and senseless, beneath the wheels of the very carriage that should have borne him to his marriage feast.

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"Will he live?" Ronald Dare put the question with frightened eagerness, and Doctor Clayden shook his head.

"I think not—shall I say I hope not, Dare? Surely for him, of all men, death is best."

Captain Dare did not answer; he could never have put the anguish of his thoughts into words. There was a terrible truth in the doctor's uncompromising words that brought the cold drops of a mortal terror to his brow. What was there for Bruce Dare but the living death of madness, or the shame of public condemnation—and—perhaps—

He paused there, passing his handkerchief across his face, with a hand that trembled like that of an old man. Yes, death was best for Bruce; and yet, as he thought of those who loved him—of kind Lady Dare, of innocent Ethel, even of Crystal Joyce—the young man's heart melted within him, and he turned aside with a stifled sound that was half sob, half groan.

"Be a man, Dare," the doctor said rebukingly—though he knew well enough that there was no lack of manliness in that unselfish grief. "Think of the poor mother—the unhappy bride."

Ronald did think of both, until thought became agony. He knew that he must see both soon, and shrank from the interview with what he called a cowardly dread. He had caught one glimpse of Ethel's deathly face as she knelt by Mrs. Medwin's side, and he knew that Lady Dare had fallen insensible under the shock; but he had come on to the Rectory, whither, by Mr. Challis's directions, they had brought Bruce's almost lifeless body.

The rector was terribly upset by the occurrences of the day, and still more so by the information given by the strange doctor, and confirmed by the local surgeon, that Sir Bruce Dare would in all probability never leave his house alive.

"Such a shocking thing," he said, pacing the long room with nervous, hurried steps, "and so incomprehensible. You have never yet explained why you interrupted the service."

Ronald looked up with haggard imploring eyes; and the doctor answered gravely—

"My reasons were terribly strong—you must know by and by, but do not ask them now."

The rector shook his gray head. Of all things he disliked being kept in the dark, and he felt that an explanation was to him most justly due.

"There is but little mercy in your silence," he said in his stern tones of clerical rebuke, "since by it people will be led to place faith in Sir Bruce Dare's mad confession."

"Sir Bruce Dare is mad," was the calm answer—"has been mad at intervals for many years, though he kept his secret well. I must leave you to piece out the story as you will. I have no more to say for the present, while his life trembles in the balance."

And in the meantime, while Sir Bruce lay unconscious of all the tumult, unconscious of his imminent peril and near release, Scantlebury was in a perfect fever of excitement and balked curiosity. Never had such a sensation thrilled the quiet place. Even Florence Medwin's murder paled into insignificance before this shocking tragedy. Those who had been within the church related to those without the details of the interruption and subsequent incoherent confession; and those without could tell how the flying madman was struck down with a swift relentless blow before the porch.

"And the poor bride, did you see her as she came out?" one asked another eagerly. "She had not fainted—no—not she; she was like an angel to her poor aunt, who was quite overwhelmed."

"Yes—I saw her; and I saw Lady Dare, when they carried her out—she that looked so handsome and stately in her rich dress not an hour before—she was like a log in the men's arms, and it's my opinion she had had some sort of a stroke."

"And where did they take her—not all the way to Dareholme?"

"Oh, no; she lies at the Rectory too—and of course Miss Joyce is with her!" So the tide of gossip rolled on—and the October day wore on from bright sunshine to gray mist, and from misty evening to bright moonlit night; Bruce Dare lying through its every change in the same

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heavy sleep, watched at intervals by the two doctors, by Ronald, and without rest or change by Crystal Joyce.

Crystal had come straight from the church to the Rectory, and, a little to Edith Challis's annoyance, had installed herself at once as head nurse."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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A BEAR STORY.

(Newcastle Advocate.)

"Bear stories, like fish stories, are always interesting, so I will tell you a 'wee sma' one," said a returned American sportsman the other night to a group of Newcastle acquaintances. "It is a story, however, that has caused my New York friends to dub me Annanias II," he continued. "It runs this way: A couple of seasons ago I was up in the Tobique country after moose. The first night we struck camp—that is my guide and I—it was raining pitchforks, so we went to roost very early. There were two bunks in the camp, and they had been erected state-room fashion, one above the other. The guide occupied the upper one, while I snored in the other. We had had a hard tramp that day, and it wasn't long before my friend and I were driving our pigs to market. Suddenly I was awakened by something tugging at the funny bone of my left arm, which was the one on the inside of the bunk. It was daylight, and I quickly cast a glance over my left shoulder, and of all the scares I ever got I got at that minute. Here was a lanky grizzly in bed with me, with one paw locked around my arm. The few hairs on my pate stood out like porcupine quills, and my toes played a tattoo on the foot board. I dare not move. I dare not speak. The bear was lying on his back with his mouth wide open, sleeping as quietly as a kitten. Where, oh where was the guide? I waited and waited. Suddenly bruin opened his eyes, looked hard at me for a moment without relaxing his grip. He lifted his head, put out his tongue and licked some of the perspiration from my face and then resumed his former position. He had hardly gone asleep again before the guide appeared at the open door gun in hand. He grasped the situation in an instant. But what was he to do? He could not fire for fear of hitting me, the bear being on the inside. I looked at him, my eyes spoke more than words could have done. I saw him grab a bottle of old Scotch, and cautiously ascend to the upper bunk. I waited for further developments. It seemed like an age, but it couldn't have been more than three minutes. He removed a board in the bunk and put a hand through with the bottle in it. He held the whiskey over bruin's mouth for a second, and then drop, drop, drop, it went down the animal's throat until there wasn't a drop left. I shook myself free and jumped up. Bruin opened his eyes, and started to follow, but fell helplessly to the floor. He was paralyzed. The rest was easy. I sent a bullet to the animal's heart, but as I did so a few drops of the whiskey squirted out of the bullet-hole and took me square in the eye."

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