

CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.

She chanced to tell me that you had called some time before, and that you had walked in this direction. All in a moment, my dream came back to me, with such force and vividness that I felt as though I must walk as far as here, and see for myself that you really were not in danger. I thought, then, it was just a foolish fancy, even while I obeyed it; but, when I got in sight of the mill, and saw it in flames, and heard your shouts, I knew my dream had come true; and I just ran up the stairs, without stopping to think whether I could get through the flames or not. If I hadn't saved you, I could have died with you, dear, and that is what I should have wanted to have done.

Deeply moved, I clasped her to me, and for a moment or two, there was silence between us. The hearts of both were too full for words.

One thing I was glad of—the dear child had evidently no suspicion of foul play.

She had told me she supposed I must have dropped a match among the straw as I went up, and I did not contradict her.

The fact that the door of the room in which I was shut up was fastened betrayed nothing, inasmuch as it was not locked or bolted; it simply fastened of itself, and could only be opened from the outside.

Vera imagined the wind had blown it to and this I did not contradict either.

I was anxious, however, to know whether she had met her mother coming away from the mill, so I said—

“How came your mother to allow you to be out alone at this hour, Vera? Did she know?”

“I think not. She was lying down with her headache, her maid told me. She must have been asleep, for her door was locked, and she did not answer when I went to it, though, of course, I only tapped very lightly for fear of disturbing her.”

By this time we had come within sight of the house.

I set my lips sternly as I thought of what Lady Gramont's feelings would be when she saw me—when she knew I had come back to denounce her, after all.

The first person I saw when we entered the house was she—the guilty woman herself.

She was standing dressed all in white, at the top of the staircase.

She saw me, and her eyes dilated, and her cheeks grew ashen pale.

Another moment, and then—I never quite knew how it happened—she uttered a shriek which will ring in my ears until my dying day, and ran down the stairs enveloped in flame.

She had overturned a lamp which stood on a table behind her, and her thin, diaphanous garments had caught like so much tissue paper.

She was literally aflame from head to foot, as still uttering those frightful shrieks she rushed down the stairs, and fell at my feet in the hall.

In a moment I had seized hold of the mats and rugs, and was extinguishing the flames. But in my heart I knew she was too horribly burned to recover. The doom she had planned for me had, by a most awful retribution, recoiled on her own head. She was to die by the most fearful of deaths—death by fire!

Very tenderly they bore the poor, charred, tortured body to a couch, and, hour after hour, doctors exhausted all their skill while Sir Harold stood by in mute agony, and Vera lay sobbing in my arms.

But from the very first there had been no hope, and, at midnight, just as Christmas Eve was merging into Christmas Day, they came and told me she was gone!

CHAPTER X.

I HEAR THE TRUTH.

That was the saddest Christmas day of my life. Very early in the morning, when Vera had at length been persuaded to go to her room and try to take some rest, Gwynne came to me, with a countenance of ashen greenness, and in his eyes a look such as told me he at length knew all.

I held out my hand to him, and when he laid his own within it, I wrung it hard in silence.

It was the only way I could think of showing my sympathy.

For the life of me, I could not have spoken a word just then.

“Jack,” he said, presently, “I know all. I suppose you guessed that, and it is only right that you should know it, too. There are some things that need to be explained.”

“I don't want to increase your grief, dear old fellow,” I said, very earnestly. “Don't tell me just now, at any rate. Wait a little, and you will be able to hear it better then.”

“I would rather tell you now, Jack. Nothing can increase my pain—nothing—or, so I fear, can decrease it. Besides, it is only right that you should know. In the first place, Vera was not—was not—her daughter.”

His voice trembled.

I could see what it cost him to speak of her.

For myself I could not help a rush of joy from passing over my heart.

Dear as I love my precious Vera I had not been able to help a sort of shuddering horror when I reflected that our children—if God blessed us with any—would have to acknowledge that guilty woman as their ancestress.

“Then who is Vera?” I questioned after a painful pause.

“The daughter of the late Comte de Gramont, and she is eighteen years of age, instead of sixteen, as she was represented. She herself does not know or dream that—that she was not her mother.”

Little by little, slowly and painfully, and with many pauses, he told me the whole tragic story, as he had received it from the dying woman's lips, when at her own request, and for a few brief minutes, she had been alone with him a little before the end.

Her true name was Gertrude Lascelles, and she was only eight and twenty years of age.

Her life, from childhood, had been spent among thieves and swindlers.

She had been concerned in jewel rob-

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Burdock Blood Bitters

Suffered For over eleven years I 11 Years. suffered with Dyspepsia and tried everything I could think of, but was unable to get relief until I took Burdock Blood Bitters. I had only taken one bottle when I commenced to feel better, and after taking five or six bottles was entirely well, and have remained so ever since, and feel as though B.B.B. had saved my life.—Mrs. T. G. Joyce, Stanhope, P.Q.

Covered My little boy, aged 10 With Sores. years, was a complete mass of sores, caused, the doctor said, by bad blood. His head and body were entirely covered with sores, and we could find no cure. Finally I got a bottle of Burdock Blood Bitters, and before one-half the bottle was gone he began to improve and by the time it was finished there was not a sore on him.

I used the B.B.B. as a wash as well as internally, and it seemed to give great relief as soon as it was put on.—Mrs. Philip Mitchell, St. Mary's, Ont.

beries in half a dozen European cities, and in India as well.

It was in India she had met the Comtesse de Gramont. The poor lady was dying of fever in a lonely marsh, with none but Indian attendants with her.

Gertrude Lascelles had tended her in her dying hours, and had learned from her enough of her affairs to see she might safely personate her.

She and her late husband were without any near relatives, except their child, Vera, and neither of them had been in Europe for over a dozen years.

Gertrude Lascelles saw her buried; then she returned to Europe as the Comtesse de Gramont.

There was only one difficulty—Vera was too old to be her child; but she persuaded the nuns at the convent where she was educated that they had been mistaken in her age.

Vera, she averred, was only four years old when she came from India—not six, as they had believed.

Once Vera was in her care, she had learned to love her; nay, more, had become so penetrated with the sweetness and purity of her character that she had even some desires and longings after a better life.

She had hoped to effectually conceal herself from her old associates by retiring to Switzerland; but there was one man who tracked her out—a man who loved her and who held her promise to become his wife.

This was James Carey, the man she had murdered last Christmas Eve.

He discovered her whereabouts, and wrote urging her to return to England.

Disobey him she dared not, since he threatened to disclose the truth to Vera if she did.

To England she came, and journeyed on to Wales where James Carey awaited her. They met at a masked ball, a public carnival, and while there Carey received information concerning some stolen jewels, which had been hidden in the pass by a member of his gang who was seeking to rob them of their due share of the spoils.

He hired a carriage and drove to the pass, Gertrude Lascelles accompanying him.

In the pass he renewed his proposals of marriage, and swore to her he would never suffer her to rejoin Vera, or to pose as Lady Gramont, unless she accepted him.

There was a fierce quarrel, and, in the heat of it, she drew from her bosom the pistol she always carried with her, and shot him dead, afterwards escaping to Switzerland without suspicion; or it she was suspected at all, it was only by members of the gang.

Some months after, she met Sir Harold, and again ventured into England.

By this time another of her old associates had found her out, and, as she was really in need of money to carry out her pretensions as Lady Gramont, she consented to let one of them into Deepdene Manor by night on condition that she had a share of the booty.

She entrusted her own jewels to Lady Mallory, the more securely to divert suspicion from herself.

The thief had carried off these jewels and Lady Mallory's [and it was arranged that Gertrude Lascelles should secrete the rest of the stolen property in her own chamber until the next evening, when she was to take it to him, receiving, in return her own sapphires, which she desired to retain.

“I suppose I need scarcely tell you, Jack, that your poor Nero died by her hand,” said Sir Douglas in conclusion, “nor that she inveigled you to the old mill with the intention of silencing your lips by death.”

“I guessed it all,” I answered, hoarsely, for I was deeply moved by the sight of his distress. “Ah, Harold! dear, dear old fellow, I wish I could help you to bear it!”

He stretched out his hand to me with a look I shall never forget.

“I loved her, Jack!” he whispered, while

his big, manly frame was shaken by a strangled sob; “always remember that. Let her be what she might, I loved her.”

Three days later we buried her—that beautiful and guilty woman.

Beatrice de Gramont was the name inscribed on the coffin lid.

Gwynne and I had debated together very seriously, and had decided it was better so.

No living being was injured by the deception, and, as to Vera, I knew she was in no state to hear the truth just then.

She had loved the dead woman with the tenderest devotion, and we knew that a discovery of the whole ghastly truth would be almost more than she could bear.

After the funeral, Sir Harold quitted England—I feared never to return.

CHAPTER XI.

SIR HAROLD'S RETURN.

Again it is Christmas Eve, and there is now no shadow to darken my Christmas joy—or, only the shadow of the past.

It is three years since Gertrude Lascelles was laid in her grave, and, for more than eighteen months, Vera has been my wife.

How dearly I love her, and how fully she returns my love, no words can say.

It is enough that we are happy with the happiness that springs only from perfect wedded love.

My old uncle died some time ago, leaving me his property, so that I am in something more than comfortable circumstances and I often say, laughingly to Vera, that, should it happen that our one small son and heir is fated to have half-a-dozen brothers and sisters, there will thank Heaven be sufficient for them all.

For a long time after that awful tragedy at Deepdene Manor, Vera's health was delicate—the shock had been almost more than she could bear; but under the kind and almost maternal care of Lady Mallory, with whom by Sir Harold's earnest wish, she made her home, she gradually regained her strength, and, though this was longer in coming her old sweet brightness.

To-night I did what I have been meaning to do for months, and yet have put off from day to day—I have told Vera the whole tragical story that has been related in these pages.

I have told her who and what was the woman whom, for three years, she has mourned with the mourning of a bereaved and loving daughter. It was a great shock to her.

At first I almost feared she was about to faint away, but I took her in my arms and kissed and soothed her, and after the first shock was over, and she wept a little upon my shoulder, she was able to talk calmly of it, and to thank me for keeping her in ignorance thus long.

“I am glad I know now,” she said. “It would not have been right for me to have gone on mourning for her as my mother. Yes, I am glad I know now, but I think I could hardly have borne it then.”

After a while she said—

“Poor Sir Harold! what he must have suffered! How I wish he would come back and let us try and comfort him!”

Scarcely had she said this when the butler came in to tell me a gentleman was asking to see me.

“He says he would rather not give his name, sir. I thought, perhaps, you would step into the hall and see him for yourself.”

“I will come, Webster,” I said, and I followed him out into the hall, where there stood a tall figure, muffled up to the eyes almost and with the snowflakes still clinging to his long, fair beard.

He stood in the darkness corner of the hall, and I did not recognise him till he stretched out his hand, and uttered just one word.

“Jack!”

“Hal!”

Yet it was he himself—Sir Harold.

How I flung myself upon him shaking him by both hands, and all but embracing him, I need scarcely say.

In less than a minute I had bundled him into the drawing-room and presented him to Vera, and, I verily believe, all three of us were as near laughing and crying in a breath as ever were sensible people in all their lives.

“Where have you come from, Hal?” was my first coherent question.

“Algiers. I have been living there these last nine months.”

“And when did you reach England?”

“This morning. I went to Deepdene first, and then came straight on to you.”

“And you mean to spend your Christmas with us?”

“If you will have me. Lottie has consented to it, on condition that I go back to Deepdene for New Year's Day. I was just longing to see you Jack—you and Vera.”

He paused, looked at my wife, then looked back at me, and his lips formed, yet scarcely formed the question—

“Does she know?”

“Vera knows all, Hal,” I answered, and then my dear wife came forward with the sweetest grace, and took both his hands in hers, and whispered such words of sympathy as only women know how to speak.

After a time, she went away to dress, and I was left alone with Gwynne.

He sat opposite to me, and, as the ruddy fire light played upon his dear old face, I saw how much his grief had aged him.

There were lines about his lips and brow, such as the years alone could ever have brought there and the hair above his temples was almost as white as snow.

Still, his face was not unhappy now; he looked like one who had wrestled with a mighty sorrow, and, it had not killed it quite, had, any rate, made himself its master.

He saw my searching glance, and smiled—a smile that was sweet and bright as well as sad.

“You are wondering whether I have found a cure for a broken heart, old fellow he said. Well, yes, in a sense, I think I may say I have.”

I uttered an exclamation of thankfulness. “Oh, Hal, I am so glad! so thankful!”

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I was going to say, but he stopped me with a little gesture.

“You are not to think,” he said very gravely and slowly, “that, because I can come back to England, and because I can look my old friends in the face once more and take their hands, and smile into their eyes, I have forgotten what happened upon this night three years ago. No, Jack, if I live to be a hundred, I shall remember seeing her as she came down that staircase a mass of flame—I shall remember every tone of her voice as she gasped out her dying confession, just as distinctly as though it had happened yesterday.”

“My poor old Hal!” I said, very earnestly, as he paused.

The thought of my own wedded happiness made me heart throb very tenderly and sympathetically for him.

“But,” he continued, with a calm bright smile, “although the past must ever be to be a most painful memory, and although I loved her with too mighty a love for me to ever love again in this world, yet within the last few months I have fought strenuously against the dominion of a selfish sorrow; and I believe, I may say I have obtained the victory. I have remembered I have duties to do, and I have come home to do them. I shall take my proper place at the head of my estate, and the bulk of my fortune, seeing that I shall never have a child to inherit it, will be spent in ministering to the poor. Thus I shall bestow happiness; and, Jack, old fellow, I believe I have learned that that is even better than possessing it.”

I could not answer him.

There was something so grandly noble about him as he thus spoke—though his bearing was simple enough, and free from all touch of self-consciousness—that I could only sit and gaze at him, and wonder at the sad and tragical fate which had doomed to a life of loneliness a heart so noble and so pure.

THE END.

THE WIFE'S YEAR OF SILENCE.

Marriage Customs Among the Armenians and the Turks.

“The conduct demanded by a newly married Armenian woman will strike Americans as very singular indeed,” said Antranig Azhderian, a young Armenian whose book, “The Turk and the Land of Haig,” has recently been published. “She utters never a word except when alone with her husband, until after the death of her first child. Then she is allowed to talk to her child. A little later she is permitted to converse with her mother-in-law; still later her own mother may again hear her voice, and before a great while she will speak in whispers to the young girls of her household. She must not leave the house during the first year of her married life, except to attend church. Her discipline as a bride terminates after six years, but she will never again open her lips to a man unless he be her kinsman. Young girls are allowed to have a liberty of conduct that is in striking contrast. They chatter freely and cheerfully with whom they please.”

“The Armenian woman differs radically from her Turkish sister. Neither seclusion, nor polygamy, nor divorce darkens her present or threatens her future. She is not educated with her brothers, however, as American girls. I remember how puzzled I was when I entered an American college and saw girls seated among the boys in the classroom.

“John,” I said to my neighbor, “what are the girls here for, to make the room look pretty?”

“It seemed incredible that anyone could think a girl capable of learning with her brother. It is considered a disgrace likewise for a man to walk publicly with a woman, even though she be his sister. She may entertain men callers, and, of course, her face is never covered, like a Turkish woman's, but her mother or some older female relative is always present. They attend the same entertainments and church but may not sit together. The women's seats in church are partitioned off and are in the rear.

“While among many old Armenian families parents contract for the marriage of their children while they are in their infancy, in the majority of cases the young people are permitted to make their own selections, though always with the consent of their parents. Elopements, therefore, are unknown. The marriage tie is sacred in Armenia, and death only can break it.”

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