

POETRY.
A LITTLE WHILE.
Tis such a little while we walk together
Along life's way.
Some weary feet that march beside us
Falter
Each passing day.
Dear friends that greet us in the morning
Vanish
Ere it is noon.
And tender voices melt away in silence
A broken tune.
A brief sweet time we journey on to
gether
Through fields of green.
And then our voices break the silence
never
That falls between.
No loving word can reach them through
the distance—
No kindly deed—
We call to them in tender, loving ac-
counts—
They take no heed.
We long to see the dear familiar faces,
But all in vain;
The footsteps that keep pace with ours
bravely
Come not again.
We catch the echo of a voice grown
silent,
Faint and afar,
A dim white face gleams out among
the shadows
Like some pale star.
Tis such a little while for loving kind-
ness,
Or cold disdain,
To smooth the way for weary feet that
falter,
Or chide and blame;
A little while and it were unavailing
Kind words to say,
For those that walked yesterday beside
us,
Have passed away.

SELECT STORY.

MISS MIDDLETON'S LOVER.

—OR—
PARTIED ON THEIR BRIDAL TOUR.

By the author of "A Forbidden Marriage,"
"That Pretty Young Girl," etc.

CHAPTER I.
A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

He was young, handsome, clever, gay, polished—the last man in the world one would ever have suspected of being the hero of a mystery.

He had been the most popular man at the clubs, much sought after in society, the beau ideal of the belles, and the idol of their maidens.

When he suddenly cast himself up alone in his beautiful home, dismissing all his servants save two old and faithful ones who swore solemn allegiance to him in life or in death, refusing his best friends admittance under any condition, so wonder his unaccountable conduct gave rise to strange rumors—rumors which reached his ears he heeded them not.

What mattered it to him, whose soul was torn with the cruellest emotions, that the censorious world thought or did.

He paced the floor in the wildest despair for days and nights at a time, until at last exhausted nature forced him into a few brief hours of forgetfulness—it was his own affair, he told himself.

There was one room in the isolated gloomy mansion into which no one was ever allowed to enter—not even the servants. The silken curtains were kept carefully drawn night and day; the door had been securely fastened and the key thrown away. When it was forced open in after days, they lay thick on the ebony book-cases, the velvet chairs and mouldering green carpet.

Several costly paintings hung here and there about the apartment, and those who entered, noticed that one of them was turned with its face toward the wall—righting it, they found it was the portrait of a young and marvellously beautiful woman.

The peculiarly curious event which had changed the current of three lives, happened in this way—
One stormy night in August, several months previous to the opening of our story, Frederick Esmond, the subject of this narrative, who was then at the head of the well-known safe and lock company on Oxford Street, London, sat alone in his office busy over the firm's books.

He was so engrossed with his work, that he had not heeded the flight of time until the clock from an adjacent bellry rang out in slow measured strokes the hour of ten.

"By George!" exclaims Esmond, starting up with a low incredulous whistle and closing the ledger with a bang—at the same time consulting his watch—what would he have imagined that it was that late—time actually whirled by a fellow when he's busy—wonder if it's raining, it's been threatening hard enough all the evening."

As he speaks, a blazing flash of lightning mingled with a terrific crash of thunder, presages the coming of the terrible storm; but the wind howling and raging like a demon around the corner of the building, dashes no raindrops as yet against the window-pane.

"It's going to be a devil of a night and dark as Hades," says Esmond, meditatively, twirling the ends of his thick blonde moustache—"Ten to one I'll not be fortunate enough to strike a hansom because I want one particularly, and—"

The sentence never was finished, for he hears a slight noise at the street door—the knob turns and it swings open.

"The night-watch going his rounds is attracted by the unusual sight of a light in the office at this hour," he thinks, smiling as he starts forward—but at the first step he draws back voluntarily, and an exclamation of astonishment falls from his lips—
Before him, standing shrinkingly in the doorway, he beheld a tall, slender young girl, so marvellously lovely, Esmond asks himself if she is a vision or a reality, and her face from that moment lives in his memory on forever.

He sees in the first rapid glance she gives her, a fair, innocent, girlish face, a trifles too haughty perhaps, framed in a mass of dark curling hair, half revealed, half concealed by the hood of the long black she wore—but that which caught and held his attention curiously riveted was the pair of large dark eyes strangely brilliant, and dilated much like a frightened child's, which he fancied glanced over his head rather than at him.

He has always prided himself on his ability to read pretty accurately the character of people whom he met—from the expression of their faces; here was one whose expression, or rather the lack of it, puzzled him exceedingly and impressed him strangely, but withal he was struck by her beauty.

looked so badly in all my life, and before such a delectable charming girl too. Then he recalled his scattered senses, remembering she had not as yet, stated the object of her visit.

"Is there anything I can do for you Miss?" he repeated.

The great dark eyes glanced around at the door as if she had listened to the walls and stood about the room, and a peculiar expression flitted over her face.

"I must get the safe open for my uncle at once," she faltered, in a voice so musical it set the young man's heart throbbing—"he has forgotten the combination."

Esmond looked at the young girl aglance.

"My dear young lady," he responded, as soon as he was sufficiently recovered from his astonishment to reply, "I will take great pleasure in attending to the matter, the first thing in the morning if you will leave your address, as for attending to it to-night—it is practically impossible; the men we have here for such work have gone home. It is by the merest chance I am here to-night and you find the place open."

She clasped her little hands together with a gesture of entreaty, and with a glance from those strange, dark, fathomless eyes that few men could have resisted, she repeated in a low, faint voice, so that he could hardly hear her, "On the safe must be opened at once."

That settled the matter; Esmond would have gone through fire and water for just such another chance from those dark starry eyes.

"It is really an unheard-of procedure at this hour," he stammered, blushing deeply, "but if it is such a matter of great importance, and it will be of any benefit to you, I place myself at your service, Miss."

Nothing save the rare beauty of that face could have influenced him against his better judgment to comply with so strange a request. He could not distinguish her low murmured reply.

In a moment he had gathered the necessary implements together, smiling amiably, while, as he wondered what his friends would think if they knew that he, Frederick Esmond, the wealthy owner of the widely known safe and lock factory—with an income of £50,000 per annum—was thanking fate for the opportunity that would permit him to step into the place of one of his workmen, to be for long hours at the opening of a safe, merely to gratify a young and exceedingly lovely girl.

"I am ready," said Esmond, shortly, still she hesitated. "Ah, she is waiting for me to call a cab," he thought, and very gallantly he suggested so doing, but to his great surprise she turned and walked hastily down the street.

"Great Heaven, have I offended the young lady?" he thought in alarm—profuse in his apologies as he gained her side.

"The storm will be upon us soon," he explained, "that I believed it the wisest course to pursue."

She did not deign to answer him.

"If she could not have trusted me sufficiently to ride with me why did she come for me?" he thought, considerably nettled by her peculiar conduct. The expression of her face struck him now as being well—uncanny. As she hurried along, she seemed to have entirely forgotten his presence—to ignore him completely, and he was not used to being slighted.

This was quite a new order of things for Esmond; he felt puzzled—but the situation was certainly novel—and romantic.

She stopped short at length before an imposing mansion in Hyde Park, swiftly ascended the marble steps, pushing open the door, which, strangely enough, was ajar, though the light in the lower corridor was extinguished.

Passing quickly up the broad stairway which was faintly illumined by a light from above, and entered a room toward the right; Esmond following.

It was a magnificent apartment as he saw it in the soft glow of the lamp light—luxurious in its every appointment. In an alcove revealed by the crimson velvet portiere, which were looped back by gilded chains, he saw the safe, which he noticed was his own make. It bore upon it the name of the well-known banker, John Middleton.

"This is the safe, I presume," said Esmond, rather resenting being so completely ignored.

She passed him, walking hurriedly up the stairs, and he saw her enter a room at the top of the well-known safe and lock company on Oxford Street, London, sat alone in his office busy over the firm's books.

He was so engrossed with his work, that he had not heeded the flight of time until the clock from an adjacent bellry rang out in slow measured strokes the hour of ten.

white, shapely blighted hands that had washed the steel drill and file for two long hours, "and all to please an unreasonable whim of a beautiful young girl, too coldly proud to look into my face or answer my questions, but looked instead into vacancy over my head?"

All that night the lovely face with its dark, bright eyes flitted before Esmond's mental vision.

It was late when he reached his office the next morning; the secretary, foreman, and a group of men were discussing an item in the morning paper as he entered.

"What seems to be the commotion?" said Esmond, nodding pleasantly.

"A great robbery that occurred last night, sir, in the home of Banker Middleton in Hyde Park. A safe, one of our make, by the way, was opened and an immense sum of money which he had been too late to send to the bank was taken. The safe appears to have been opened by a most skillful and daring cracksmen, who seems familiar with the peculiarity of our lock," said the secretary containing—

"The banker was found dead, lying in a pool of blood close by the safe, and as near as I can make it out he must have surprised the robber in opening the safe and got shot down, I haven't finished the article, yet, sir."

Esmond sunk down with a gasp of horror on the nearest seat, his face flushing and paling, the veins standing out like whip-cords on his face and neck. It seemed to him he was stifling, choking. He rose abruptly and left the office with unsteady steps.

"My God!" he cried hoarsely, when he had gained the street. Robbery! murder! And I have been the dupe, the tool to further this most infamous scheme. The is but one course to pursue," he murmured, his face pale as death, "and that is to go before the Police Inspector at once and make a clean breast of the whole affair. Surely no man ever yet had such a strange story to relate."

Then his mind reverted to the young girl who had led him into this unenviable predicament. It was clearly his duty to bring her to justice, point her out to the minions of the law.

It was a great shock to him that she, with the face of an angel, was base at heart. Of course she was some outsider who, knowing in some way of the money placed that night in the banker's safe, had devised this daring and most ingenious manner of obtaining it.

A few moments of rapid walking brought him to the Inspector's office. He brought a moment, with his foot on the stone steps.

Then commenced a strange war of contending emotions in his heart between duty, and an unaccountable, morbid desire to screen this girl even in the face of this atrocious crime.

It would be absurd to say that he had fallen in love with this girl whom he had seen only for a few moments, he told himself, and yet he could not account for the fascination she had for him. He wished he could doubt the evidence of his own knowledge. Should he solve the great mystery that had startled all London, or remain silent and let her go free, a wicked freedom at best? Surely he must expect that he would do this, or did she believe for his own sake he dare not reveal his knowledge of the affair.

For himself, Frederick Esmond had no fears, his own excellent reputation would sustain him, he stood irresolute a moment, thinking of the knowledge that he held the fate of this beautiful girl in his hands to decide.

CHAPTER II.
THE BANKER'S NIECE.

In that moment of hesitation, the matter was adjusted by a strange stroke of destiny, a Mr. Rutherford, a Scotland Yard detective, who knew the well-known safe manufacturer by sight, came hurriedly to him.

"Mr. Esmond, I believe," he said, raising his hat. "You are the very person sir, whom I wished to see," he said. "I have been detailed to work up a very singular case, you can give me a few minutes if you will. A safe was broken into last night, one of our make, by the way, and in a skillful and most adroit manner. No doubt you have read of it in this morning's paper?"

Esmond nodded; he could not trust himself to speak.

"I am on my way to make an examination of the safe now," said Mr. Rutherford, "and if I can get one of your men to accompany me, and explain the working of that peculiar lock, I shall be greatly obliged."

Esmond caught at the suggestion and the opportunity thus offered him to re-enter the banker's house.

"I will go with you," he said abruptly.

"Now?" he asked Rutherford.

"As well as now as any other time," responded Esmond, and entering a coupe together they started for the gloomy mansion in Hyde Park.

the expression of the eyes was different. He could not probe the mystery of the sudden change.

Her eyes must soon turn upon himself, of course, the recognition would be instantaneous; what would happen then?

Even as the thought flashed through his mind, Rutherford turned to him saying, "Miss Middleton—Mr. Esmond, proprietor of the safe and lock works, Oxford Street."

The lovely dark eyes turned full upon him.

It was a critical moment to Esmond. She did not start as his name was mentioned, or his keen searching gaze met hers, as he had expected; not even the slightest tremor was visible in the face turned toward him so calmly.

With an easy grace and innocence of demeanor, that fairly staggered Esmond, the young lady acknowledged the introduction, bestowing upon him scarcely more than a passing glance, then turned to Rutherford again.

"Does she imagine, can she imagine that I do not remember her," he thought, in angry impatience; yet even in that moment the girl's wonderful composure seemed to fascinate him fresh in spite of all.

"Would to Heaven I had never entered this house," he thought; yet, with a revulsion of feeling he was thankful that he and not another, held this startling adventure, which could wreck this young girl's future with one word from his lips.

With a smile he recalled the introduction, bestowing upon him scarcely more than a passing glance, then turned to Rutherford again.

"Will you kindly tell us, if you can, Miss Middleton," Rutherford was saying, "how much money the safe contained?"

"You were conversant with your uncle's affairs I imagine. Can you tell me at what time Mr. Middleton retired last night, what he did upon finding the safe open and the money gone? One of the servants informed me you both entered the room together."

Miss Middleton sank into the nearest chair, dropping her lovely face in her hands for a moment. When she raised it the long dark lashes lying on her cheeks were wet with tears.

"May I tell you in my own way?" she asked, faintly.

"Certainly," responded Rutherford, placing a seat for Esmond and taking one himself near the young lady.

"As you know," she began, slowly, "Mr. Middleton was my uncle, and although he had lived at bitter enmity with my father for long years, when my parents died, his heart softened toward the penniless orphan they had left. He sent for me; I have lived here ever since."

"One question please, Miss Middleton," said Rutherford, "did the banker all these years lead you to suppose you were to be his heiress?"

"No, oh no," she answered, looking frankly up into her interlocutor's face.

"He told me repeatedly that all of his wealth at his death should go his nephew Mr. Karl Heathcliff; but he often declared that some day he would add a codicil to his will leaving this house in Hyde Park, but nothing more to me."

"That was unfair, did you not think so?" asked Rutherford, studying the fair face before him critically.

"No, sir," she retorted spiritedly, "his wealth was his own, to do with as he pleased. I had no right to expect anything. As it is, I could never have repaid him for his kindness to me."

"And again Esmond saw the lovely dark eyes fill with tears.

"But about the money, Miss Middleton," said Rutherford, intent upon leading the subject to the all-important topic uppermost in his mind, "can you give me any idea as to how much money the safe contained?"

"Upward of a hundred thousand pounds in Bank of England notes," he replied slowly. "My uncle made everything save his house into cash, intending to make some great investment on the morrow."

"It was his custom to bank all moneys, was it not?" suggested Rutherford.

"Yes, sir," Miss Middleton answered, simply, "I wish to make matters worse, that evening after placing the money in the safe, he forgot the combination of the lock and it bothered him greatly, as no one save himself knew it."

"And in the morning?" questioned Rutherford.

"My uncle and I entered this room together after breakfast. One glance at the safe, the door of which stood ajar, just as you see it now, and he cried out in a sharp, hoarse voice that sounded like nothing human:

"Look, Irene! Great God! some one has broken into the safe!"

"In an instant he was kneeling beside it crying out:

"All I have in the world has been stolen, Irene!"

Esmond turned pale as death as he listened to her tale of despair, he stood out on his forehead. He saw the point now; the whole burden of this most atrocious robbery would be thrown upon him if he breathed one word of what had transpired.

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