

A FORBIDDEN MARRIAGE

BY LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

Author of "When Lovely Maiden Stoops to Folly," "A Cruel Revenge," "The Heiress of Cameron Hall," "Ione," "Parted at the Altar," Etc.

(CONTINUED).

"No-no," faltered Reine. "I am greatly interested—go on."

The gossiping maid looked pleased; she was fond of relating the story, which sounded like a romance, ending in a tragedy, as she called the general's death, to any one who had not heard it.

"As I was saying," she continued, "the heiress ran away with the handsome spendthrift and married him, but as every one predicted, she soon found him out. He had married for money, not for love, and a pretty life he led her, to be sure. The general's wrath was terrible; he cut her off without a shilling, and when the young husband found that out, he left her."

"Some one wrote to the general about it, and he went on to bring his broken hearted daughter home; but when he got there, she had vanished. He hunted her the whole world over; but he never found her. He came home, took to his bed, and never left it alive."

"The old general's widowed sister was sent for from away down in Tennessee, and she got there just as he was breathing his last."

"He beckoned her to him, and when she bent over him, he whispered brokenly:

"Always keep the latch string out, Rachel; some day Reine will come back—but I shall not be here to welcome my darling." He had her picture brought from the library and hung where he could see it, and he never took his eyes from it. It would have made you cry if you had heard his mind wander, the moment before he passed away. He seemed to imagine he was at the gate of heaven and had met his dead wife there, for he cried softly—"Open the gate—open the gate," adding plaintively: "You ask me what I have done with the little child you placed in my arms, dear, when the angels took you, and I answer I guarded her well, Evelyn; but—I lost her; some day she will come to you and me at this gate; we will wait for her here, Evelyn; no matter where she has been, what she has gone through, she is still the little darling that once slept in our arms—our pretty little Reine."

"After that he never spoke again, and we know he had gone to join his angel wife, to wait at the gate for Reine; poor, pretty, willful Reine, whose name was the last word he ever spoke on earth."

"Are you crying, lady?" asked the maid. "Ah, well, I told you it was a pitiful story—it would bring tears to eyes of stone."

By a great effort Reine kept from swooning. She rose unsteadily from her chair, and put down the cup of tea untasted.

"I must go, thank you; and good-bye," she said. And, like one suddenly stricken blind, she staggered out of the house, and down the path, and was lost in the darkness beyond.

She crept up to a little, white gate, by the side of which great weeping-willow trees grew—opened it, and stole softly up the narrow path to the grand old soldier's grave, she knelt down upon it, parted the grass, laying her face upon it, and with her arms thrown about the cold polished marble shaft, wept tears that it grieved the angels to witness.

"The world has all gone wrong with me, father," she sobbed. "Heaven has punished me sorely for disobeying you; oh, how bitterly I have repented! I have been unhappy in my love—in everything. I have come back to die upon your grave, papa."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Suddenly it occurred to Reine that it would be far better to steal away from that spot, that it would be better to hide herself forever from the gaze of those who had known her, in the dark, rippling waves of the silent water that skirted Fairlawn.

What matter what became of her whom nobody loved?

With pale, cold lips, poor Reine kissed the marble shaft, praying her father to forgive her for the past, and plead at the great White Throne for what she was going to do—for she was soon to join him.

Gathering her dark cloak about her

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and looking back with one long, lingering gaze, that had her very soul in it, at the dark, solemn stone house on the sloping hillside, and at the steady flame that shone like a beacon light from the kitchen window, the poor child turned away, and crept on down the path toward the dark, sullen stream.

The wind blew coldly on her face, but she did not hesitate. Never again after to-night, would she see the great throbbing world with its mysteries, its miseries, its hopes and its loves. When spring came again her feet would not tread the grass; never again would she see the sweet violets, the yellow daffodils, such as grew around the dear old home, nodding their heads in the breeze. Never again would men worship her beauty; never more would she see love glowing in passionate eyes for her sake. It was all over.

She paused on the margin of the dark, sullen stream for a moment, then climbed down on to the moss covered rocks.

"Good-bye, cruel world," she moaned; "no one will ever miss me; no one cares for poor, hapless Reine." Only the echo of her own voice answered her. Silence settled down again. A land-bird, roused from its sleep, opened its bright eyes and gazed at her from its nest among the rocks—that was all. No human being cared or rose from their quiet sleep to save her.

Reine took off her cloak slowly. The cold winds chilled her, but she did not mind it. Her beautiful, curling, golden hair had loosened from the coil at the back of her head, and fell in a shining mass of glittering splendor to her waist, but she did not heed it.

"I am going to die, and you will never know how I loved you. In the last moments of my life, I dare own it even to myself, Bernard," she moaned. You will never know that I learned your worth too late—yes—I love you, and you alone. I have seen no one else that I love in the crowd of faces that fill the world! I have seen only yours, only yours, Bernard, by night and by day; not his, Bernard. I have since learned that I never loved Waldemar Waldron. It was only a mad infatuation. Your face has smiled upon me in my dreams; it has shone down on me from the stars; it looks up to me from the water; in the light of the sun, in the beams of the moon. All the world is blank except the spot where you are—and that is—Heaven. Suddenly some one touched her on the arm.

"What are you doing here lady?" asked a voice which she recognized instantly as black Tom's—he had been one of the attaches of Fairlawn Villa ever since Reine could remember.

She shrank back from him. "I meant no harm in strolling into the grounds," she murmured, endeavoring to disguise her tone, but it was no use; he sprang forward peering in dismay into the white, averted face.

"It's Missy—Missy Reine, by all de saints, above!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Yes, it's me, Tom," she sobbed. "Don't tell anybody I have been here. I have been to poor papa's grave, and now I am going away again. Oh, Tom! take great care of it, keep the grass trimmed down close, and—and—plant some white flowers around it—my white rose-bush, that I loved so well, and the white hyacinths—you will attend to it Tom?"—This tearfully.

"Oh, yes, Missy Reine."

"I—I—am going now, Tom," she faltered, turning away, but he caught at her gown with trembling hands.

"What fo' should you go away fo' again, Missy Reine," he entreated; "do stay, it am yer own home, ain't it? Missy Woodstock—de ole general's sister, am a very nice pussen; but oh, Missy, we ole folk 'bout de place like de ole ruin' best."

"I can't stay Tom," Reine declared shuddering, but—

"Man proposes and God disposes."

It was destined she was not to leave Fairlawn Villa so soon. She took one step forward, then exhausted nature and whirling brain asserted herself. Reine slipped down unconscious in the long lush grass, at faithful Tom's feet.

"Poor Missy Reine," he muttered, as he raised her in his strong arms. It was but the work of a moment to carry her to the house; and almost as soon as he had laid her down, he had told his story of how and where he had met Reine and all that had transpired, to the astounded servants who had assembled, attracted by the confusion.

"Thank heaven Reine is found, at last!" sobbed Mrs. Woodstock. Reine's aunt, bending over the prostrate form, and death white face.

All the usual old-time restoratives proved of little avail, and a doctor was quickly summoned, also a telegram to Bernard Chesleigh, telling him what had occurred, was sent flashing over the wires, which brought him on to Virginia, and to Fairlawn Villa without delay.

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It was many a long day ere a knowledge of her surroundings came to Reine.

One day, as soon as Reine was able to be about, her aunt sent for her to come to the drawing-room, adding that "some one was there who wished to see her very much."

Girl-like, she took a glance in the mirror before going down, smoothing her collar, and pushing back the rings of golden, curling hair from her forehead; and in that momentary glance she could not help but notice how pale and thin she had grown. She could scarcely recognize the wan face reflected there.

She walked slowly down to the parlor, and opened the door. Some one was seated in the shadow of the bay window—some one who uttered a cry of intense surprise as he beheld her; and the next moment Bernard Chesleigh was clasping her hand, looking joyfully down into her face. "Why did you hide yourself like this from those who love you best?" he asked, sadly.

Reine hid her face in her hands.

"Did you know, Bernard, that he—

he left me forever?" she sobbed. "Left me willfully, deliberately—left me to the world's cold mercy, dependent upon myself?"

"I know all, Reine. But why, in the hour of need, did you not go to your father, who loved you so well, or come to me?"

"Papa would never have received me," she faltered. "He shut his heart against me. I have deserved it as the price of my folly."

Bernard Chesleigh was a good man, but he could scarcely refrain from cursing the villain who had wrecked Reine's young life. For God had punished her sufficiently for forgetting the words of her dear old Bible: "Honor thy father and thy mother."

Poor Reine! She was but another pitiful example of the folly of eloping. Will young girls never take heed, and learn to shun false-hearted lovers whom loving friends and parents strive to warn them against?

She continued to improve in health and strength rapidly; and once more, as she stood among the roses, and her clear laugh rang out, she seemed like the merry, joyous Reine of yore.

Bernard Chesleigh watched her with yearning, sorrowful eyes, no longer seeking to hide the truth from himself. He loved her with all his heart. She was his first and only love, the other half of his soul. Yet she was separated from him as completely as though she lay in her grave.

The days that passed were all too bitter-sweet to Bernard Chesleigh. He was only human, not a saint, and it was beyond human nature to deny himself the joy of being near the woman he loved.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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French-Canadian Authors.

Out of thirty French-Canadian authors who submitted works of dramatic composition for a competition got up by Mr. Georges Ganvreau, of the Theatre National-Francais, nineteen produced pieces considered worthy of public representation. The fact is indicative of the most notable phase of the great literary activity going on at present among the French-Canadians. Almost all these works are in the domain of light comedy, and are more French than Canadian in idea and expression.

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