

Two Watches

BY MYRA A. GOODWIN.

One watched the dawning of the year,
The fading stars left nothing save
A winter morning cold and drear,
And snow upon a now made grave.
Then bitterly, "How can bells ring,
And men rejoice! As lies the snow
Upon her breast; life's sorrows cling,
To hearts left helpless in their woe."

Another lifted trustful eyes,
And smiled to see the dawn again.
"My love is safe in paradise,
Nor can she know my toil and pain;
Her very resting place is white,
As her pure soul, but dearer grown,
What star of promise in our night!
How gentle God is with his own!"

CUPIDITY AND CRIME.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lord De Gretton was the first to speak, first glancing at Arthur, his cold glittering eyes scanning the handsome face and upright soldier-figure in a superciliously appraising fashion that at any other moment would have made the young man's quick blood tingle. He crossed over to his wife's side, and said abruptly—

"Lady de Gretton, you will follow me."

He spoke with the abrupt harshness of a master addressing a slave who had fallen under his displeasure; but no answering flush arose on the wife's pale face; harshness and gentleness were one to her now. The worst that could come to her had come; she was alike past fear and hope. She did not, even by a deeper-drawn breath or the quiver of an eyelid, give any sign that she had heard her lord's command or intended to obey it. She stood like one turned to stone, staring out over the wide waste of water, from which the last touch of sunlight had fled.

"Will you come?" Lord de Gretton muttered grimly; and the light of the sunken eyes grew more and more dangerously cruel. He bent his head till his gray moustache swept the soft girlish face, and whispered with hissing emphasis in the small ear, "Are you mad, to defy me now?"

She shivered slightly, drew a pace or two away, and for the last time her eyes sought Arthur Beaupre's in wild and pitiful appeal.

The look pierced Lord de Gretton's armour of cool self-possession and stung him to jealous fury. He knew that the girl he had wooed and won brought him no love as her marriage dowry. So much she had frankly told him from the first, and the confession had but made him the more determined that she should be his. He was so used to be wooed that the girl's unfeigned reluctance to accept his wooing gave her a novel and piquant attraction in his sight. He had heard the whole story of her first unhappy love from Christine Singleton's truthful lips, and could afford generously to overlook the fact of a dead lover; but now was the lover really dead, or was Nora doubly false?

The suave polish of his manner covered a brutal nature, and in the rare moments of agitation he permitted himself the brutality rose to the surface, as now. He seized the slender wrist with cruel force, and swung the girl round with a savage suddenness that wrung a passionate word from Arthur Beaupre's lips and a wild cry from hers—

"Arthur, Arthur, save me—save me from him!"

Then, and not till then, Arthur Beaupre broke the silence so hardly maintained. He came forward, very white and stern-looking, and stood before the cruelly-united pair, his worn young beauty a sharp and terrible contrast to the jealous ago confronting him. How fervently he prayed that the right words might come to him now, that he might close, and not widen the breach between these two, and help, not harm, the unhappy girl for whom his heart bled!

"Hush, Nora," he said almost sternly, though he would have given his life to speak one word of comfort in her ear, to

drive the dreadful frenzied look from her dark eyes. Then, turning to Lord de Gretton, he said eagerly, with all his honest heart in the words, "Lord de Gretton, permit me to explain all that seems strange to you now—"

But Lord de Gretton cut the sentence short; wheeling round upon his heel, he stared insolently into the frank blue eyes, and said slowly, with a sneer, while he twisted the ends of his long gray moustache into sharp points—

"So you will have it then—will thrust yourself into the foreground, and be seen! Your companion has little cause to thank you. I wished to ignore Lady de Gretton's escapade, to close my eyes to the awkward fact that my wife, on her wedding-day, wandered out at sunset to entertain her old lover; but you will not let me."

Clear, cold, and cruel, each word fell with sharp distinctness, and stung, as it was intended to sting, not the pale girl round whose overwrought brain a merciful mist was gathering, who heard all that was said in a dull uncomprehending fashion, as though it concerned her not at all—not Nora, but the man who would—how gladly!—have died to defend her.

"For shame!" he cried, with a hearty ringing scorn that would to a more generous opponent have been a convincing proof of his honesty and good faith, but only stung Lord de Gretton's pride sharply, and moved him to a more implacable hate. "Oh"—Arthur flung back his bright head, impatient of his own halting utterance—"where shall I find the words to convince you, if your own knowledge of her innocence and spotless purity be not enough? Nora, tell your husband how you met me here; for his sake and your own, do not leave him under an impression so cruelly false."

Nora started at the direct appeal, but only turned her eyes with a vague troubled stare from one to the other; her lips moved a little, but no sound came from them. Arthur's heart sank within him. Had her brain really turned with its weight of trouble?

Lord de Gretton broke in with a jarring laugh—

"And they say female wits are quickest, female tongue most glib to explain away an awkward situation; the proverb fails here at any rate, Mr—"

"I am Arthur Beaupre," the young man said sadly.

"Well, Mr. Beaupre, Lady de Gretton still leaves the explanation of this scene to you. By-the-by, I think I have heard your name in connection with my wife's before."

"You have heard the true story of our past, no doubt," poor Arthur cried, his voice trembling with the passion he could not control—Lord de Gretton doubly protected by his age and the fact that he was Nora's husband, had the impulsive passionate young soldier at a cruel disadvantage, and rejoiced in the fact with a savage and cowardly joy—"as you may hear the true story of our meeting now. Nora Bruce was once my promised wife. An hour ago I believed her so still, and she believed me dead—as I shall be to her henceforth. In the first shock of the sudden meeting she remembered only what had been, and—Heaven bless her for it!—rejoiced as Nora Bruce might have rejoiced that I was given back from the dead. Then, in a moment, she remembered you and her new duties, and—and we said good-bye!"

The pleasant full-toned voice faltered a little over the last words; but the blue eyes never wavered, nor shrank from Lord de Gretton's mocking and malignant glance. Arthur's one thought now was to shield the miserable girl who was so manifestly incapable of taking her own part. Some inner instinct warned him that Lord de Gretton's wife would have no easy path to tread; and, since no earthly power could break the chain she had so rashly forged, he could only pity her with an intense unselfish pity, and inwardly swear that he would do nothing to make her hard path harder still.

Lord de Gretton was a clever man of the world, quite keen enough to know truth from falsehood and see through the finest histrionic display. He did not for an instant doubt that the man before him was speaking absolute truth, that Nora had believed him dead; but his conviction was anything but soothing to his pride. Innocently or not, they had injured and aggrieved him, had wounded his sensitive vanity, and compelled him, the haughty and impassive Lord de Gretton, to play the ridiculous part of the gray-haired husband.

Jealous and deceived, he stared at Arthur Beaupre, his deeply-sunken eyes glittering angrily, his pale face actually flushing as he entertained the galling thought. Could Lady Olivia but have known it, all wrongs were fully avenged in that moment of bitterest mortification.

To recognize a wrong was, with Lord de Gretton, to resolve to revenge it. He ground his teeth together with savage energy, and vowed within himself that one of the offenders at least—the one who was helpless and absolutely in his power—should receive exemplary punishment at his hands, so, returning Arthur's eager beseeching look with a coolly insolent stare, he said, in slow drawing tones that fell with maddening distinctness on the young man's ear—

"I suppose, for my own sake, as well as Lady de Gretton's, I had best accept this explanation."

"It is the true one; you cannot, dare not doubt it!" Arthur cried hotly, all the fiery pride he tried so hard for Nora's sake to curb to meekness flaming now from his bright blue eyes and ringing defiantly in the clear young voice.

"I have said I shall accept it," the other returned, with exaggerated emphasis and a cruel enjoyment of the pain he gave—"but upon certain conditions only."

He paused, looking keenly into the other's face, as awaiting a response; but Arthur merely bowed, not trusting himself to speak.

"First, you, or we, must leave this place at once; it is not large enough to hold the trio."

"I return to town to-night."

"Good. In the second place, you must promise that you will never seek Lady de Gretton's company again."

"Pardon me," the young man interrupted, with uncontrollable haughtiness, "I have never sought Lady de Gretton's company. I believed the lady to be still Miss Bruce."

Lord de Gretton, twisting his gray moustache with elaborate care, listened with his most supercilious smile, as though gently tolerating an interruption that in no way influenced the predetermined current of his thoughts and speech.

"Just so," he said, with a nod of careless condescension that made Arthur's quick blood boil again; "and being better informed now, you will understand that your paths diverge widely from this moment and need never touch again."

"I understand," Arthur returned coldly; and, with a smile of quiet satisfaction, Lord de Gretton turned to his wife.

"Come, Nora," he said authoritatively, "it is time for us to go."

He lifted the little hand that hung so listlessly by her side, and drew it within his arm; the contact chilled his fingers; death itself was not more icy or inert. Nora neither resisted nor aided his efforts; the only sign of life left in her blazed in the burning misery of her eyes.

Mechanically she permitted herself to be drawn towards the path she had descended, ignorant of that last bitter drop still to mingle with her cup—mechanically, without another word or look, she would have passed the man who watched her with an intense and yearning pity that for the moment swallowed up all selfish pain. But, crossing his path, Lord de Gretton paused abruptly, unable to deny himself a Partisan dart.

"As you two are old friends, and must part for ever," he said, with mocking emphasis, "you may be allowed the luxury of a farewell word. Nay, Mr. Beaupre, you are most ungrateful; few men in my position would show such magnanimity as 'his.'"

For something like a smothered exclamation broke at last from Arthur Beaupre's white lips. He was heart-sick and weary of the fiendish cruelty with which this man revenged himself and revelled in his power to torture them. With one look, eloquent of scorn and disgust, he would have turned away, merely bowing and not daring to trust himself to speak.

But at that moment, moved by some vague impulse, Nora raised her eyes to his, the lovely Irish gray eyes in whose clear truthful depths he had seen every thought and every fancy mirrored in the happy days gone by. Where now were the innocent love, the innocent mirth, the gay girlish sparkle? Something rose in his throat and seemed as though it would strangle him—something that mastered his manhood and brought a mist of tears to dim his vision as he met that blank, hopeless, lost, and miserable gaze.

"Lost!" Yes, that thought sent the last worst pang of all to Arthur Beaupre's loyal and generous heart. Rather would he have seen any intensity of conscious pain than the suggested frenzy of that gaze. She did not seem to know, or rather she seemed to look through him, as though no object stood in her path. Her widely-opened eyes were those of a sleep-walker, haunted by a torturing dream and utterly unconscious of all that was passing around her.

At any cost she must be aroused from this dangerous apathy. Arthur took the cold little hand in his and spoke entreatingly—

"Nora, it is good-bye indeed, now. Heaven bless and shield you, and make you happy!"

She shivered slightly, and he saw her lips twitch; but she repeated the "good-bye" mechanically, and her eyes never softened, though the tears stood thickly in his.

Lord de Gretton made an impatient gesture, and the spell that held Arthur Beaupre was broken. Silently he drew back, and let the married pair pass him; silently he watched them as they made their way up the winding road, now vanishing, now reappearing, as they passed from terrace to terrace up the well-wooded height until they were lost to sight among the tall trees that closed in around the picturesque white house at which Lord de Gretton's honeymoon was to be spent.

Once only Nora turned her graceful head and looked back—and that look was destined to haunt Arthur Beaupre's fancy with cruel pertinacity for many and many a week to come—will haunt him with more or less of horror in the remembrance until he has done with earth and earthly things for ever.

With a little shiver, for the night-air began to grow chill, and he was still weak from recent illness, Arthur pulled his soft hat down over his brows, drew up his coat-collar, and, resolutely fixing his thoughts on the future and turning his back upon the scene of so much misery, made his way to the railway station, and was soon on his way to London.

He had travelled incessantly lately, long and far that day; but, weak as he was, he seemed incapable of physical fatigue. He tried to sleep; but his thoughts centred persistently in the place he had left, in the girl he had deserted in her misery.

The one fear that overrode all other in his thoughts was that Nora's brain would turn under the accumulating troubles that had come upon her. He could endure to lose her, to see her happy with another, he thought, with a little tightening of the generous heart that could ignore its own sharp pain; but he had left her in merciless hands, and there had been something