

## Thy Neighbor's Wife.

In a rustic arbour sat Eva, apparently deep in thought, her sweet eyes fixed upon the ground. Certainly, she was equally unconscious of these dark, sombre eyes, which were devouring her with such a look of love and longing, and of those velvet brown ones, whose glance reflected "covet, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness."

Miss Martyn's heart was indeed hot with fury at that moment, and yet, with the fury there mingled something of secret exultation.

This man, who had dared to slight her, should feel the weight of her revenge. Surely she could make his life bitter for him since she had discovered his secret. He was in her power since he was in love with a married woman, and that woman her brother's wife.

### CHAPTER VI. THE PICNIC.

The next day, the vicarage people were to join a picnic-party.

This had been arranged for Caroline's sake, Eva being anxious to obtain for her all possible pleasure during her stay with them.

Montague's foot was quite well by this time, and had he adhered to the resolutions made as he sat among the mountains in the purple twilight of that Sabbath evening, he would certainly have quitted the perilous presence of Paul Martyn's wife ere this.

But circumstances had seemed too strong for him, and he had drifted idly whither their current led him.

While the doctor insisted on his resting his ankle, he must needs stay; then, when Caroline appeared upon the scene, and begged him to stay for this function and for that, deluded himself with the fancy that it would be rank discourtesy to refuse her.

And so he had stayed day after day, drinking deep draughts of love from Eva's eyes, and forgetting there was poison at the bottom of the cup.

The picnic was to be held, some twenty miles away; the vicarage people were to travel by train to meet the rest of the party at a given point.

All through the day Miss Caroline's eyes were on Montague and her brother's wife.

She wanted something tangible to report and then she meant to go to her brother and disgrace them both.

She chose to believe Eva returned Montague's passion, and that her seeming indifference to him was only a sham and a blind.

Judging her sister-in-law by herself, and by her own miserable standard of womanly purity, she was quite certain she would be ready to break her marriage vows, and elope with Montague, if only he would hold out his hand to her and bid her come.

Those lynx eyes, watching unceasingly on the day of the picnic, saw much to confirm her in her suspicions.

Never before had Montague so openly devoted himself to Eva, never before had he dared to let his eyes rest upon her with so much of passion in their dark, sombre depths.

He sat beside her at the luncheon, and when, afterwards, an old ruin was explored he offered her his hand to guide her.

Caroline saw her hesitate, and, in a tremulous whisper, decline his help; she saw him, with a look that seemed almost one of proud defiance, take her hand in spite of her refusal; she saw her thrill and tremble at his touch; she saw a faint pink flush mantle her face from chin to brow.

"The shameless creature!" muttered Caroline, vindictively. "She dares to pose as an angel of purity. But Paul shall know the truth this very night."

Montague had quite shaken off the gloom which had a ore or less oppressed

him during the last fortnight. His spirits seemed, indeed, to be almost feverishly high.

He laughed, he jested, he flung about witticisms like rain, and was the life and soul of the party.

The vicar decided he had never known his clever friend so brilliant before; and Eva every now and then stole at him a wistful and almost frightened look, as though doubting what this new mood might mean.

The truth was that he had come to a desperate resolution.

He was like a man who set his all upon a die.

The unnatural excitement kept him up, but he dare not pause to think.

He told himself he must go straight forward and meet his fate.

For him the issue of that day was tremendous—it was life or death.

About an hour before the time fixed for returning, Eva was sitting in a retired nook when Montague approached her with a hurried, almost unsteady gait, and eyes that never met her own.

"Mrs. Martyn your husband wants to see you," he said hurriedly. "He wants to show you Fairy Falls."

She rose in a moment.

"Where is Paul? I will go to him."

"You could not find him by yourself. You must wait, please, let me show you the way."

"He sent you to fetch me?"

There was different interrogation in her voice.

Her eyes raised themselves from the ground, and sought his, with that curiously frightened look.

"Yes, he sent me to fetch you," was the steady answer.

"It is far, Mr. Montague?"

"Quarter of a mile, perhaps; not further. He was leading the way as he spoke."

She glanced around, as though in search of someone to accompany them, but there was no one within sight; and after a single moment of indecision, she followed him.

The way was through a winding path, very steep and narrow.

It was impossible to walk in it, except singly, as he continued to lead and she to follow.

Not a word was spoken between them until they came in sight of the Fairy Falls.

Then Montague turned round and said—

"He isn't here, after all; he must have come to meet us, and taken another path."

"Then let us go back at once," said Eva, speaking very quickly.

He pulled out his watch and looked at it; then gave a start as though with surprise.

"Why, it is nearly train-time!" he exclaimed.

"No doubt he has gone to the station and all the others with him. We had better make the best of our way there unless we are to lose the train."

"We must not do that!" she cried, turning pale, and with a look of the deepest agitation. "It is the last to-night. Oh, pray let us make haste!"

"Come, then."

He led the way as before, and she followed feverishly.

Still not a word passed between them.

She walked so quickly that she could scarce get her breath.

He was strangely pale, and his dark eyes glowed like coals of fire.

Could she have seen his face she must have known there was something wrong—must have refused to submit herself any longer to his guidance.

In ten minutes they came within sight of the station.

The train was already in, and they were fully fifty yards away.

"Oh, do let us make haste!" cried Eva, almost wildly, and beginning to run.

She seemed beside herself with fear lest they should be left behind.

They reached the station.

There was no sign of any of their party; no heads thrust out of the window to look for them.

In her agitation she scarcely noticed this.

All she wanted was to be in time for the train—not to be left behind.

Montague opened the door of a first-class compartment. She entered it quite breathless, then looked round, realized that she was alone with him, and made a movement as though she would have got out again.

But he quite blocked up the doorway.

He was looking out, his back turned to her.

She could not see beyond him.

"Where are the others? Can't we get to them?" she asked, and her voice trembled curiously.

"They are in another carriage; you cannot change now; the train is all but on the move. At the next station."

She sank back in a corner seat—the corner farthest from him.

There was a frightened look in her eyes, and she was trembling; but she made no further protest.

She could not have got to the window and looked out for herself while he stood there.

Perhaps she understood this, and deemed it best to be quietest.

In less than half a minute the train moved out of the station.

It moved in the opposite direction to her home; she saw this half-abstractedly at first, then she supposed they were simply being shunted to some other line, and at last after a couple of minutes, during which the engine had got up steam and was going along at a high rate of speed, the conviction crept in upon her mind that they were in the wrong train—that she was going away from her home instead of to it.

She started up then with a look of terror.

"Oh! this is the wrong train. What shall I do? I must get out at the next station. Will it be far away?"

"Thirty miles," was the brief answer; and, as he uttered it, the man turned from the window, and she, saw his face, saw its set, haggard look, saw the dogged determination of his eyes.

She knew then what had happened.

She knew he had brought her to this train of set purpose.

"You knew!" she panted. "You knew this was the wrong train!"

He flung himself on his knees at her feet, took hold of both her hands, and looked up into her face with such a look of love and longing, of passionate pleading and humble entreaty for forgiveness, as must have pierced her heart if she had loved him.

"Yes, I knew. We are on the way to London. Forgive me, love, forgive me! I have resisted as long as I could, but the struggle has been too much for me. It has broken me down at last."

"To London?"

"Oh, the horror in her wide-open eyes; oh, the anguish in her voice!"

"Yes, I have dared to think you love me. If you do, you will be merciful to me—you will forgive. Darling, don't you see, I can't live without you any longer. It was this or death."

"Better death than dishonour. Let go of my hands, Mr. Montague. It is an insult for you to so much as touch me after what you have just said."

Her voice was cold and stern.

He could not have believed such sternness possible from one so sweet and gentle. It so far awed him, that he released her hands, rose from his knees, and stood regarding her with a fixed and gloomy look.

She was the first to speak again.

"If all the world had told me you would stoop to do as I have a thing, I would not have believed it," she said, with a little catch in her breath.

Her bosom heaved stormily, and there was a look of fear mingling with the sternness in her sweet blue eyes.

"It has been a deliberate baseness. My husband never sent you to fetch me."

"Yes, he sent me to fetch you, but not to the place I took you to."

"And when you said the others were in some other part of this train, you lied to me."

"Yes, I lied to you."

His voice sounded ominous in its calmness.

The gloom on his brow deepened; his strong, firm mouth was twitching; his sombre eyes glowed like coals of fire.

"There must be an end to all this, Mr. Montague. At the next station I leave you, and go back to my husband."

"Yes, there must be an end to it," he exclaimed, in a deep, sombre voice, answering the first part of her speech, without seeming to heed the second.

"God knows I have borne as much as mortal man can bear. I can bear no more. There shall be an end."

A moment he paused, clenching his hands fiercely as they hung by his sides. Then he said, with a world of sad wistfulness in his tone and look—

"I thought you loved me."

The color flamed into her face, which had been pale as ashes before.

"You dared think that?" she panted; and as she spoke she trembled from head to foot.

"I did dare. I was so sure of it that I allowed the knowledge to send me mad. I am mad still, and nothing but death or you can cure me. Yes, I thought you loved me. I saw you change colour beneath my look; I saw you tremble if I came near you; I—"

She was marble pale again now, and her face seemed frozen in its icy sternness.

"Do you know how you are insulting me?" she said, in a loud voice, which trembled curiously. "I am a married woman. If you have forgotten this, I never have—and never shall. I changed colour, if I trembled in your presence, it was because—I will own it now—you forced me to own it—because I saw your guilty love, and dreaded lest you should insult me—as you are doing now."

A look of unutterable despair swept over her face.

"You mean this?" he questioned, in that deep, sombre voice, flashing upon her a glance which sought to read the innermost secret of her soul.

"Of course I mean it, Mr. Montague," she answered, proudly; and her steady

eyes never wavered beneath his burning glance.

"You do not love me?"

"I do not love you."

"And you desire to go back to your husband?"

"I desire to go back to my husband—the best, the noblest husband in the world. He was worthy of a true friend."

He took no notice of that stinging taunt; he seemed, indeed, not to hear it.

All his thoughts were concentrated on the fact that, after all, she did not love him.

"Very well!" As he said this, he came close to her, and caught her wrists in a strong, fierce grip. "You say death is better than dishonour. So be it. I am willing. But I must share it with you. Come! Let us go to our death."

She looked up into his face, and knew she was dealing with a madman.

Yes, for the moment Basil Montague was mad.

The long fierce struggle of the last fortnight, acting upon a singularly fiery nature, had deprived him of that self-control which is the highest attribute of reason.

"You will kill me?" she muttered faintly. "Oh, how cruel!"

That was all. She did not weep or rave, as some women would have done.

Within that slight form, behind that sweet gentle face, there lurked an heroic soul.

"Cruel!" he repeated. "Cruel! My God! to hear her use that word to me! Oh! what I have suffered through her in these last three weeks! She has driven me mad, destroyed my body and soul. And she tells me I am cruel! My God, my God!"

He let go of one of her wrists, and opened the door of the carriage.

"You will not love me?" he asked, and there was morbidness—the morbidness of utter despair—in his deep rich voice.

"No."

"Then we must die; there is no other way. I am mad; I know it—I feel it. But there is a method in my madness. It would torment me, even among the lost, to know that I had left you with your husband. In two minutes the Irish mail will pass us. You shall have no lingering death. We will fall in front of it. You shall go straight to Heaven and I to my reward."

Still she did not move; still she uttered no cry.

She stood before him, white and rigid, as marble, but in her blue eyes there was the light that told of an heroic soul.

He put out his arm, as though to throw it round her, and as he did so, his eye fell on the wrist which he had released, and he saw a cruel bruise where his finger had gripped it.

At the sight of that a revulsion of feeling swept over him.

He thought that he had offered violence to this delicate creature whom he worshipped, had bruised that soft white flesh he would have died to defend, sobered him, and banished his sudden madness better than anything else could have done.

"My God! what was I about to do?" he groaned.

He shut the carriage door, then sank into a seat, trembling all over with emotion.

She, watching him, knew the moment of peril was over.

He would offer her neither love nor death.

His madness had left him. He was himself again.

She had expended all the energy of her soul in prayer in those last few moments, praying, not for her own life, but that he might be saved from his great wickedness.

She knew now that her prayer was answered.

"I have hurt you," he muttered, hoarsely. "I, who would have died to protect you. I was mad. It is my only excuse. I was mad."

"But now you are sane again."

Her voice was very soft and gentle her look was entreating, and yet she was quite calm.

She longed to break into a fit of sobbing, but she knew this was not the moment for such weakness.

"Yes, I am sane again," he answered humbly, "I dare not look for forgiveness, but I beseech you give me your trust; you are safe with me. I will attempt no act of violence, I will speak no word of love. At the next station I will telegraph to your husband that you are safe, and then if you will let me I will take you back to him. It is for you to decide, whether he is to believe we entered this train by mistake."

"I would rather he did not know."

As she said this, her lip quivered, and a slight flush overspread her face.

"So be it; I will do whatsoever you bid. It is the only reparation I can make."

After this there was a silence between them for fully half-an-hour.

He sat with his face buried in his hands, as though he dared not so much as raise his eyes to hers.

She gazed steadily out of the window, and fought down—at what cost—her woman's tears.

The train slackened speed; it ran into the station.

Then he did at length break silence.

"Forgive me!" he pleaded, hoarsely, and raised his haggard eyes, full of a dumb agony, to her face.

"I will try to do so, Mr. Montague—on one condition."

"And that?"

"Is that you leave my husband's house tomorrow, and never try to see my face on earth again."

"I promise," he answered, steadily. "It was what I intended, even if you had not asked it."

Great was the consternation among the rest of the picnic-party when it dawned upon them that Eva and Montague were nowhere to be found.

After a vain search, they decided to go to the station, in the hope that the train might be waiting for them there.

Of course, they did not find them; but inquiry of one of the porters elicited the fact that he had noticed a tall, dark gentleman, and a lady in a grey dress, come running to the station a quarter of an hour ago, and take their seats on the train then just starting for London.

"They were in a terrible hurry," he said, "and looked as though they had been running hard for the train."

Two or three of the party looked at each other significantly at this piece of news, and Caroline flushed and then turned pale.

The vicar alone was unmoved, or only as much moved as he might be with a pleasant jest.

"Why, then, they've got into the wrong train," he said, laughing gaily. "You may depend they thought we were already in it somewhere, and they just took their places where they could. What a pull I shall have on Montague after this! Upon my word, it's quite a joke. I might have easily got into the wrong train; indeed, it's what I always am doing, and Eva isn't much better; but Montague is so very wide awake. I shall qu' him unmercifully about this. Well, the sooner we get home, the better. Carrie, we shall find a telegram from them when we get there, you may depend."

"Shall we?" thought Caroline, with wicked exultation mingled with jealous rage.

She never expected to see either Montague or Eva back again.

She was perfectly certain they had eloped together.

On, to her unutterable amazement, when they reached the vicarage, a telegram was handed to her brother, and he—tearing it open—read it aloud.

"It's exactly what I thought," he said. "They got into the wrong train by mistake."

Then he read the telegram—

"Don't be alarmed; we are quite safe. Got into the wrong train. A mistake. Shall be with you by the half past nine train from here. Montague."

"There! I didn't tell you? It is just exactly as I said," remarked the vicar, with a note of mild triumph in his voice; and his face was so placidly trustful, he looked so good; so happy, that his sister positively could not speak to him just then of the suspicions which still surged in her mind.

In less than a couple of hours the absent ones arrived.

Eva looked very pale, and, complaining of fatigue, went to bed almost immediately.

Montague explained that he had entered the London train quite by mistake, but he did not add that his mistake, in truth, was that he had believed himself beloved by his friend's wife.

### CHAPTER VII. THE ATONEMENT.

The next morning, Miss Caroline had a racking headache, and could not come down to breakfast.

Eva had secretly intended absenting herself with some such excuse; but when she heard of her sister-in-law's indisposition, she deemed it her duty to go down stairs at whatever cost to herself.

It would seem to strange for those two men to eat their breakfast alone.

Before she entered the breakfast-room the post had come in, and Montague was explaining to the vicar that circumstances occurred which would absolutely compel him to be in London that day.

The vicar was expressing his regrets in his pleasant, unaffected fashion, and to this Eva was compelled to add her own, feeling like the guiltiest hypocrite and traitor as she did so.

"When must you start?" asked the vicar.

"Why, at once. My things can come after me. If you'll be good enough to send them. But for myself, I must catch the ten-twenty train."

"Eva would drive us to the station. I say 'we' because, of course, I shall go with you, old fellow."

"Thanks; but I'd ever so much rather walk."

"Would you really? Well, then we will. Perhaps, after all, Eva had better stay home, as poor Carrie's not well."

It was speedily settled.

The station was fully three miles away the walk, to it lying chiefly through the mountains; and as it would take nearly an hour, the two men started as soon as they rose from the breakfast-table.

Eva laid her hand in Montague's for the last time.

She was as pale as a lily, and her voice was scarcely audible as she bade him good bye.

"We shall turn round when we get to the curve of the road," said her husband, "Be at the window, and give us a last look."

A last look!

The words rang in her ears.

Yes, it must be a last long look, indeed.

She had resolved on this, though she little dreamed that, ere that day had passed, the decision would be no longer in her own hands.

It was not she, but Fate, that was willing a long farewell between her and Basil Montague.

When they reached the curve in the road of which he had spoken, her husband turned and waved his hand to her gaily.