



Nearing Port—Waiting for the Pilot.

THE INTERRUPTED WEDDING.

BY HURKARU.

CHAPTER III.—MISSING.

WHEN Tom reached his rooms he stared at the trunks and *debris* scattered all around, (for he had already half packed his effects) and sank into a chair. Was this to be the end? What had he done, he mentally exclaimed that he should have this misery inflicted upon him? And Edith? Oh, how he loved her! Her portrait was opposite to him looking at him with her sweet trusting eyes. He had not yet put the picture away, having felt that he must have it before him until he possessed the original. And now? He bowed his head upon the writing table at which he sat, and broke into the terrible sobbing of a strong man in his agony. Then he snatched up some note paper, intending to write to her, but his eyes were so blurred with the scalding tears that he could scarcely see the lines. He began "My dearest Edith," but flung away the pen, for what right had he now to use those words? He dashed his hand across his eyes, and observing a letter lying on the table, addressed in strange writing, mechanically opened it. The missive was from a Boston lawyer, dated that evening at the St. Lawrence Hall, informing him that Mrs. Birtle, the writer's client, desired to see him the next morning at the hotel, hinting that a failure to comply would leave only one course to be pursued, which it was hardly necessary to point out, would be disagreeable for all parties concerned. The hour named was ten o'clock, and the letter signed William Kilvey. It was all true then, and as he tore the letter up to shreds, his feelings may be likened to those of a convict,

who after having tasted a brief spell of liberty, finds himself once more within the prison walls, with the iron chain clanking as he moves. He paced up and down his room all night, now and then throwing himself upon the sofa, but never resting still for above half a minute at a time. Day broke at last, and he saw a haggard reflection in the mirror, which somehow reminded him that the world was not standing still, and that he had to meet the inevitable. He observed he was in his evening dress, which has such a disreputable appearance in the morning light. He became conscious that the next day was that fixed for the wedding, and that some sort of action was necessary. He changed his clothes, putting on his ordinary morning suit, and again sat down to write, but could not pen a word, and finally resolved to postpone his explanation, until after the interview he knew must come. His breakfast was brought in, but he merely gulped down a cup of strong tea and hurried out, walking first east and then west in an aimless manner, till the dreaded hour arrived, when setting his teeth he went into the St. Lawrence Hall, and was shortly face to face with his—wife! Kilvey, the lawyer, was present, but Tom scarcely noticed him, and stood looking at Mrs. Birtle as though hoping to find some deception. But though the small pale woman, whose luminous eyes bespoke both triumph and malice, was prematurely aged, he saw she was the real Jane Birtle whom he had married in Glasgow.

"What do you want?" he demanded sharply, with a sense of utter loathing and disgust.

"You supposed me dead, but that was only a *ruse*, and now I have returned, so let us be friends," was the cool reply.

"Name your terms, for that I presume is what you are here for," said Tom.

"Terms!" cried the woman passionately, "I will have my rights—my husband—whom I am saving from bigamy!"

"Your rights! How can you speak of such?"

"Am I not Mrs. Thomas Birtle?"

At this point Tom felt his brain reeling, his mental anguish, combined with want of food and sleep, overpowered him, and he caught at a chair for support.

A fearful smile came over Mrs. Birtle's face as she sprang towards the pitcher of iced water.

"Here!" she exclaimed, "you are fainting take this." He resisted for an instant, but then gave way, swallowed the drink and he knew no more.

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On calling round at his rooms that morning to enquire after Tom Birtle, John Vavasour was informed that the former had gone out immediately after breakfast, and therefore concluded that the indisposition of the previous evening had passed off, especially as the servant was unaware that Mr. Birtle had been sick, he having said nothing about it. Reassured, Mr. Vavasour proceeded to town, and being soon immersed in his own business, thought no more of Tom till his return home again in the evening. Edith was a trifle surprised that she did not see or hear from her lover, but her father pointed out that he was no doubt very busy completing his arrangements for the great event.

The wedding morn opened with that glorious Indian summer weather, which occasionally visits us for a short spell before our winter sets in, and very charming Edith appeared in her bridal attire of virgin white. An elaborate breakfast was laid out in the dining room, and the various presents were tastefully displayed in another apartment. The carriages arrived and with the one containing the father and daughter, proceeded to the church, where everything was in readiness, but at the appointed hour no bridegroom made his appearance. An undefinable dread overspread the party, and having waited a reasonable time, a messenger was dispatched to Tom Birtle's quarters, which were at no great distance. The messenger came back with consternation on his countenance and the strange news that Tom had not been to his rooms since leaving them the morning previous. Astonishment will but faintly describe the feeling which seized all present, for Birtle's character had been above reproach, and his disappearance quite inexplicable. Something had evidently happened, but it was likewise plain that the wedding could not proceed. When Mr. Vavasour and Edith reached home the latter was white to the lips, and but for the misery depicted in her eyes, looked like a corpse.

"Papa—papa—what can it be?" the poor girl cried.

John Vavasour's lips were very stern as he replied "I fear my child, he is a scoundrel, and has deserted you."