

# ONE LOVE TOO MANY

Or THE FUGITIVE BRIDE

By F. W. CHAPPELL

Suddenly upon the terrible hush broke the discordant voice of Leonard Harris.

"This is murder! Secure the murderers!"

The spell was broken, men began to move toward the group with murmurous hearts. And then it was that Marshall showed himself to be a man.

He sprang to his wife's side, threw his arm around her, and snatching the knife from her rigid fingers, he cried:

"Touch her who dares! This is my sin, not hers!"

But the murmuring crowd approached, and with a bound he broke through it with Bel, brandishing the bloody knife to clear a way.

He ran with her through Jim Pointer's room, pushing him aside as he arose deathly pale to meet them, dashed through the door and ran to the front gate. This he opened wide with the hope of misleading their pursuers, and then, turned suddenly inside the fence, and kept by it until he reached the back entrance.

Through this he passed quickly, and still dragging almost carrying Bel, sped on through the fields until he reached old Phibby's cabin.

He shook the closed door violently. "Let me in, mammy!" he cried.

"Quick, for God's sake!"

They heard her rising slowly, and in the instant of their waiting he whistled, clasping her closely.

"Oh, Bel! did you love me so? I will save you if it costs my life to do it."

She did not speak, but clung to him, shivering violently.

At this moment the door opened, and he pushed her in, saying, hurriedly:

"Keep her for me, mammy, till I go for a shawl and some money," and shutting the door upon her, he sped away in the direction of his own house.

## CHAPTER XII

"What does this mean, Bel Pinte?" asked the old woman, looking darkly upon the trembling girl.

"I have killed Dore Valine!" she answered, shuddering.

"Oh, my Land! oh, my blessed Land and Saviour!" shrieked Phibby.

"You've killed Miss Dore Valine? Murder, sit out from under this house's roof! I knowed it! I knowed it! My po' child! I knowed her deep sorrow along o' dis 'oman. An' it's come a'ready! Oh, you terrible sinners, does you know what you've brought dat po' boy to? Does you know dat you've flung down de 'spectable name o' Marshall into de very mire? Oh, my Land, why did you let me live to see dis day? Look heah!" she cried, suddenly ceasing her lamentations, as if struck with a new thought. "Listen to me, Bel Pinte! She came near and said eagerly, but in low tones: 'Does you love Mars Charley?'

"Do love him?" cried the poor girl wildly. "Oh, my God! what a question!"

"Well," whispered the old woman, "if you truly loves him you can save him yit. Is you willin' to sacrifice yourself fo' his sake?"

"Oh," cried Bel, "I would die for him!"

"Well, den, you mus' git away from heah fo' dat po' child comes back."

"Oh," said the girl, gasping and pressing her hand against her heart,

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dainties, the fires burned low, the windows and doors stood open, and chairs and tables were huddled where they had been thrust aside by the impatient crowd. Upon the carpet was the stain of blood, where Dore Valine had fallen, but there was no one in all the rooms. Even the body of the murdered girl had been removed.

Marshall ran from room to room still calling "Dore! Dore!" but no answer came but the echo of his own frightened voice. He ran to her own chamber from whose door he had so proudly let her but a short time before. He felt a little thrill, even in the midst of his tears, as he paused upon the threshold of this temple of her maiden dreams. Everything within was chaotic, plain, almost severe, though upon this room Jim Pointer had lavished the cost he begrudged the rest. Its richness, its still, white purity spoke to him in such strong language of its owner, that he almost felt her presence, and called again loudly, "Bel! Bel!" but as before the blank stillness gave him no reply.

He turned again, and at the foot of the steps met Jim Pointer.

"Where is she, Jim?" he cried.

"What have you done with my wife?" "Better say, Charles Marshall," said Jim, severely, and for once forgetting his long habits of respect, "better say, villain, what have you done with my child? Didn't I see you with my own eyes dragging her away? Tell me, man, what have you done with my child?"

Marshall pushed him aside.

"Good Heaven! where is she if she is not here?" and he rushed again into the dark night without. Not once had he asked for or even thought of poor Isadore Valine. He had not so much as looked toward the spot where she had fallen, nor even in his own mind wondered what they had done with the poor clay of her who but an hour ago had been laughing within reach of his hand. Alas! alas! she had given her life without the poor recompense of being mourned.

By this time the rain had begun to fall, but Mr. Mac Hall, Jim and many others continued to scour the fields, the roads and the woods in vain.

And all night long through the rain grew heavier, and finally poured down in torrents, did these distracted searchers keep up their search. But the girl had disappeared as entirely as if the earth had opened and swallowed her.

For reasons of their own the search of the populace for her soon slackened, but the next day and the next, and for many days following, did the husband and father look blindly but eagerly for the lost bride. But at last even they were constrained to give up.

An old fellow was found a few days after her flight. It was turned bottom upward upon the sandbar some two miles below. The oars were gone, but tangled in the oar locks was found a pale tea set, such as Bel had worn on that fatal night, and clinging to its stem a strand of long, dark hair. These mute witnesses were brought to Charley, who came forward to receive them, and then fell as one dead upon the floor.

After that hope was abandoned, yet both husband and father kept emissaries in search of her or what was left of her, and their advertisements in a dozen papers, appealing to her or to others who might have seen her. But all to no avail. They knew she was dead somewhere down in the deep river, and that her fair body lay awaying and tossing under the waves, caught by her dress or her long, beautiful hair upon some rack heap or reef. Still, they continued to keep up their search and to fill the papers with their pathetic messages to the dead.

Jim Pointer though blind till that night to his wife's sufferings, now, through the whole vista of her trials and temptations, and could not forgive their author. Without a word of explanation, he sent his farm books, all nearly made out in Bel's handwriting many of them, and all of them under her supervision, to his employer, shutting up his house just as if good, furniture and all, he removed to a small cabin on a farm of his own, a mile or more away. He did not speak to Marshall when they met, and the latter, too, broken-spirited for a word of any kind, made no attempt at a reconciliation.

Charles Marshall! he was paying dearly for his careless sins, and he did not seem likely he would ever be able to make amends for his old proclivities. Ah, no! the theme of his often enjoyments turned to a sick at heart. There was no going back to the old life.

He had fallen entirely out of the world, and began to think she had been a price for the unbridled passions he coveted, but which was through suffering at best.

A kind awake of nights often came to him, for the sound of her words. Her excited imaginings often came to his ears.

"The memory of me shall fill your dying day," and that the words were not true, she had wished to see him in his dying day.

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Bel's welfare. What would he do to her did he know that she had actually driven the girl to her fate? She trembled and mourned in silence, for she dared confide in none.

As for Harris, since that unhappy night, he had roamed awhile around the neighborhood, and finally disappeared.

People said he had made away with himself in despair that his had been the first voice after poor Bel's condemnation—his first hand to drive her to frenzy and death. Be that as it may, he had certainly grown more than ever gloomy and restless, and most shockingly ill-tempered from the time of her disappearance until he, too, dropped out of the small world that knew him. There was but little such made for him, however, and but little sorrow that he was gone. Only his mother wept at night over the unknown fate of her first born.

## CHAPTER XIII

Meantime, what had been the end of Bel Marshall's sudden and unexpected flight? Half distraught with the horror of her deed and the bitter pang of parting with Charley, she yet retained sufficient self command to know that in haste alone lay the chance of her escape. And with the thought that she was saving him from the shame and grief of her presence, she ran from Phibby's door straight out into the gloomy night, not caring, not considering whether her footsteps led so that they only bore her away from him she loved. She was familiar with every log and tree on the field, and dark as it was, instinctively avoided them, until she reached the fence along the river. Over this she crept with the ease born of her boyhood's childhood among the little negroes of Marshall House. Standing at a moment upon the bank, she listened to the sullen roar of the great river, and she shuddered as there flashed through her mind the thought of how suddenly and easily she might end all her sorrows therein. But she turned away quickly, shook at her own thought, for hers was not a suicidal temperament, nor, in fact, a nature to commit any great sin except upon what to her intense feelings seemed an overpowering provocation. She was about to start down the river when suddenly upon her ear fell the muffled beat of paddle wheels, and far out in the waters she saw the lights of a large steamer. The steamer, kept on turning, but with a fitful and intermittent sound unlike that of a boat in motion.

"It is around upon a bar," she thought, and then in an instant she had formed her plan of escape. She remembered an old skirt which had long lain tied to a rack heap in front of her father's place, and which the negroes used occasionally to carry their small produce to the town across the river, and running hastily along the bank she soon perceived the dim outlines of the heap of wave-washed debris. She walked quickly on to the heap, feeling each footstep before trusting her weight upon the decaying logs, and last, partly by feeling, partly by the faint glimmer from the far-off lights of the steamer, she found it difficult, it was by no means an impossible task to guide it toward the great steamer still puffing upon the river.

She had lived all her life by the water, and was not at a loss how to manage the boat, so, though she found it difficult, it was by no means an impossible task to guide it toward the great steamer still puffing upon the river.

As she approached she could hear the loud and profane voices of the deck hands complaining of the hard luck which had put them aground at that time of night, when they might be steaming on their way to Louis, or so many miles nearer St. Louis, and saw at the same time that the boat lay head downward with her bow upon the sand.

The girl pulled slowly and cautiously nearer, carefully avoiding the long rays of light which fell from the open furnace and bright, twinkling lamps. By their light she saw the boat's name, *Hesperides*, painted in large letters upon the wheelhouse. Pausing a moment to reconnoiter, she perceived that the stern lay in comparative darkness, and roved carefully around till she found a spot which appeared suitably dark and deserted for her purpose. She made her way still more cautiously to the low gunwale which she caught with her left hand. With the right she threw away first one oar and then the other, stepped on the projecting edge of the deck, pushed the stern away with her foot, and clanking over the gunwale, stood alone in the dark shadow of the wheelhouse.

She walked noiselessly forward in search of a hiding place, which she found behind some water barrels. There she crouched for a long time, it seemed to her. Not until this period of inactivity did she begin to realize the utter loneliness and misery of her state. The night air was chill and penetrating, the rain had begun to fall heavily.

"It will wash away my footprints," she thought, "this morning they will leave him one trace of me."

A deep sob broke from her breast, but no tears came with it.

She began to tremble with the cold. Her feet, protected only by thin slippers of satin, seemed heavy and cold as lead. She grew strangely drowsy and faint, but rousing herself with an effort, got up and walked softly up and down the narrow space in the shadow.

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She waited and watched through the dreary hours of the night, not knowing what to do when the morning should come and discover her to the people on board.

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