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My Revenge.

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

CHAPTER I.

A DEAD PAST.

They said I was mad when it all happened; that I was not accountable for my actions when I sought the revenge that I should have left to Heaven, and very nearly blighted the rest of my own life and my darling's by one rash act. Perhaps everybody is right, but it does not seem to me that I was mad. I had never been mad; no one belonging to me had ever had anything the matter with his mind. My senses were as clear then as they are now, and my plans as deliberately laid as any I ever made in my life.

I knew what I was about and what I wanted to do, and I never forgot why I wanted it. No, I am sure I was not mad; no maniac could have had such fixity of purpose or such determination to carry out what she had planned. It is many a long year ago now; I am an old woman, white-haired and feeble, spending my last days in peace, and only waiting for the lifting of the veil and the sound of the voices from the other side to summon me to the rest I had well-nigh forfeited by the dream of sin and anger.

I talk to my grandchildren sometimes of the long-ago days when I was young—when there were no railways nor electric telegraphs, nor any of the wonderful things they tell me now are in use. We had to sew with our fingers when I was a girl, and not drive a machine with the feet that sets stitches by the hundred in the time it took us to do a dozen. And there was no talking to people a mile and more away, as they tell me can be done now. I thought little Billy was poking fun at me when he told me, but his father said it was true, and that there was a machine for somehow doing up what people said, so that the same words could be spoken in the same voice thousands of miles away.

My son would never tell me a lie, and he said it was so, or I would not have believed all the newspapers in the world; and Billy read it out of a newspaper to me one winter evening.

But that is all what the boys call twaddle, and I am apt to twaddle, I know—old people are—and it was the story of my own sorrow that I was going to tell. I was a very pretty girl when I was young, and I had a good many lovers. I had no fortune except my face, and the men all seemed to think that would be enough, for they courted me as if I were the richest heiress in the kingdom. My father was only a poor clergyman, very poor indeed, for he gave away a great deal out of his small stipend, and we were often a great deal worse off than the peasants and fishermen around us.

I had no mother, no one but an old nurse to guide me, and she was far too fond of me to be judicious. I don't think I was a bad girl, but I was very vain and silly, and rather pleased with the attentions of the young men around me. Out of my many suitors there were two between whom I could hardly choose. We had all grown up together amongst the rocks and seaweeds of the shore, and it was not until I began to grow to womanhood that I realized that we were not sisters and brothers.

Either of them was a fitting husband for me. I had no aspirations beyond my seaside home, no wish for any society different from that which I found there. We had no kindred; my father had been brought up at a charity school, a nameless orphan, and my mother had been the only child of a farmer in the north of England, who had been earning her living as a nursery governess in a village where he was a poor curate. They had no money, for her father had been unfortunate in his business, and when he died of the worry and trouble of his confused affairs, there was nothing left for his child. They lived very happily, my father and she, notwithstanding their poverty; but she died when I was too young to understand how great my loss was, and the earth

held no woman for my father from that hour.

I was a spoiled child; there was no doubt about that; everybody gave me my own way, and even when the question came of my being married, my father would only tell me to please myself. I hardly knew how to do that, for I was as much in love with Edward Bathurst's handsome face and black eyes, as I was with the sterling qualities of my other suitor, Harry Wylde; more, I think, for he flattered me more, and told me oftener how beautiful I was—a fact which I liked to hear of as much as possible.

I think these two were the only ones who really wished to marry me; there were plenty of others ready to flirt with me, and to pay me compliments; but both these wanted me for a wife. My father favored Harry Wylde, of course; he was the steadier of the two, though not quite so well off as Edward Bathurst, who had a boat of his own to Weston-super-Mare, near which place our village was situated. He was the best match, but Harry was the best man. That was what my father used to say, and, after a time of battling with myself, I came to think so too.

I was a very happy girl on the night when I told Harry I would be his wife, and he said that he was the happiest man on the whole earth. It seemed as if Heaven almost was before us, for Harry was prosperous, and our little home was very neat, and everybody congratulated us—everybody but the man I had refused, and he swore he would be revenged on me, on Harry, on everybody concerned for my rejection of him. It had been fair enough; I had told him, without any beating about the bush, that I had resolved to take Harry; but his was one of the ungenerous natures that can brook no rivals.

"I'll have my revenge, Agnes Bartlett," he said, hissing the words into my ear with a look that made me shudder, "if I wait a lifetime for it. I'll have it when you are least thinking of it, when you deem yourself most secure; no one ever wronged me yet, without paying dearly for it, and I have a heavy debt to settle with you."

"You have none," I said proudly; "I have done you no wrong that I know of."

"No wrong!" he said, fiercely. "Is it no wrong to steal a man's heart out of his breast and make him your slave, your bondman? Is it nothing to lead a man on till the whole wide world holds nothing for him but the sight of your false face, and the sound of your witching voice, and then to tell him to his face that you are going to marry another man. Is all this nothing? You shall know what it is to me."

"But I have not done it," I said, horrified and frightened beyond measure, for he seemed in his excitement as if he were going to strike me. "I have never deceived you, not since I knew myself which I liked best."

"Which she liked best!" he echoed, with a sneer. "It is not by fair means that she has liked him, the mean underhand hound. Think of me on your wedding-day, Agnes Bartlett, for as sure as there is a Heaven above us, I will have my revenge, and it shall be sure and sharp."

All the village knew of his madness, for it seemed little else. I had not been very careful, perhaps, but I had not acted dishonorably, and he had no right to threaten and frighten me as he did. My father told me never to mind, and Harry said it was all bluster, and there was no need to take any notice of it. Edward was not a bad fellow at the bottom, and he would soon see how foolish he had been in talking so blusteringly.

"He'll come round before our wedding-day, darling," he said, "and see you married, and laugh at his own

temper." But he was not so sure as that; he went and was not in Col. our wedding-day.

"Cobble End" was a seaside village; an but not one which place, but it was v never looked prett wedding-day; it wa the birds were sing waving, and every glad that Harry an be happy. The bell louder and sweeter heard them, and th sound of the waves, the shore and ripp we walked beside.

There was no go honeymoon; we we the village close house. Harry was to Bristol and Clit but that was all, a come off just yet, f season. Harry pro thing for Edward and wild words, bu him decide to be m we should have th did not like the ide posed to the chan listening to him.

"He won't interfe he said; "he mig sweetheart."

So we were ma midst of the fishi Harry was very bu spare the day. But py as if I had tak There was no sign urst on our weddi for a long while, come home he see ent man. He sho and wished us ha was a look on his and I told Harry when he went awa Harry laughed a he was glad too w that Edward was g ble End altogether, come home to disp and bid his friend soon done; the hou the boat too, and that he was going east coast, some mouth. It was far me to feel quite could do me no h would forget his a and settle down o in a quiet, Christia

I heard of him g farewell in the vi him; I was sitting room with the doc the moonlight on when he came in had started up fr had not been thin was rather frighte he was. I said som ing him success wh he turned upon n glittered with evil "You ought rath might never hol amongst my fellow I beg your pardon said, with a sneer "Your wish shoul die conveniently s "Why?" I asked, I strove to appear "Because I shall "What oath?" "The oath to ha you and him for y have sent me into disappointed man, least expect it, m I will have venge for every pang yo suffer."

I was so frighte knew when he wen found me crying came home presen best to cheer me u what had happen never mind what said. "Revenge f fashion now," he laugh, "and no on ing vengeance like I did not know