

HELENA GRAHAM,

THE BRIDE'S SACRIFICE.

CHAPTER VI.

"Have I disturbed you, bright Jessie?" he asked, coming nearer.

"Oh, no!" she answered, blushing. "I was only waiting to rest a little while before going home."

"And dreaming, I perceive," said Herbert. "May I ask of what—of whom?"

"I wasn't dreaming," said Jessie, innocently. "I was wide awake all the time."

"Day-dreaming, I mean," said Clinton, with a smile. "Do you know, fairest Jessie, I have been at your cottage all the morning, waiting to see you?"

"To see me?" said Jessie, with another quick, glad blush.

"And not finding you there, I have come in search of you," he continued. "And found me," she said laughing.

"If I had known you were coming I would have staid at home."

"Perhaps it is better as it is, bright one; for I have found you alone. It is very pleasant to have found so fair a companion on this lonely isle."

"Yes, it is a lonely place," said Jessie, musingly; "and yet I like it better than Strathmore, or any other place I have ever been in. Only I should like always to have a friend with me to talk; and that, you know, I cannot have here. Aunt Ben is always too busy to go out; and Fritz don't care about the trouble of talking, much less that of walking, so I have always to go alone."

"And if he would go, I fancy Master Fritz is hardly the kind of companion Miss Jessie would select," said Herbert.

"Not if I could find any better," said Jessie, with a laugh; "but I have grown so accustomed to being alone now that I do not mind it at all as I used to."

"And so you are perfectly happy here, fairest Jessie, reigning queen of this fairy isle?"

"Ah, no! beautiful Miss Helena is Queen of the Isle, I am only her most loyal subject," said Jessie, gaily; "you ought to know that, having paid her your allegiance."

"What if I should say that the subject was more lovely than the queen?" said Herbert, in a low voice, and in a tone that brought the hot blood flushing to Jessie's face.

"I should say you were laughing at me, as, of course, you would be. Certainly, no one would ever think of me while Miss Helena was near. Oh! how I wish she would always stay here; and then I should have a companion."

"Ah, bright one! if I were in her place what would I not surrender for such a privilege!"

"Would you," said Jessie, looking at him in unfeigned surprise. "When why not stay? I am sure I should be glad to have you here always."

Her innocent words, her enticing, beauty, her child-like candor, were a strong temptation. For one moment he was about to fall before her, to clasp her in his arms, to hold her there for ever, while he breathed forth his mad, passionate love, and told her nothing on earth should ever part them now.

But again rose before him the dark, warning face of Helena to allay the fever in his blood. It seemed to him he could see her black, fierce eyes gleaming on them through the trees—he could almost hear her voice, shouting "Traitor!"

All unconscious of the struggle raging in his breast, Jessie stood leaning against a tree, her curved, crimson lips half parted—her blue eyes fixed on a cloud, drifting slowly over the sky, little dreaming of the far darker clouds gathering rapidly now over the horizon of her life.

And still in Herbert's heart went on the struggle. He dared not look at her as she stood before him—bright, radiant, bewildering—lest the last lingering remains of fidelity and honor should be swept away by the fierce impetuosity of passion in his unstable heart.

But his good angel was in the ascendant still, for at that moment the voice of Fritz was heard, calling loudly—"Jessie! Jessie!"

"Here, Fritz! here I am," she answered; and in another instant, honest Fritz stood before them.

"Aunt Ben sent me looking for you," said the young gentleman, rather sulkily; "and I've been tramping this half-hour while you were taking it easy here," said Fritz, wiping the perspiration from his hot brow.

"It was all my fault, my good Fritz," said Herbert, as if from a sudden matchless up her hat and basket, and fled, leaving a just terror of Mrs. Ben's sharp tongue.

"Make my excuses to your good aunt, and here is something for yourself."

Fritz's dull face brightened wonderfully as Herbert drew a gold piece from his pocket and pressed it into his hand, and then turned and fled slowly in the direction of Graham Castle, thinking all earthly happiness by centred in the opposite direction.

Mrs. Ben's reproaches fell unheeded for the first time on Jessie's ear that day. She heard not a word of the long lecture delivered with more than the good widow's usual eloquence; for she was thinking of another voice, whose lowest tone had power already to thrill to the innermost recesses of her heart.

She loved without knowing it, without wishing to define the now, delicious feeling filling her breast, only conscious she had never been so happy before in her life, and longing for the time when she should see him again. Ah! well had it been for her had they never met more.

The residence of Mr. John Cummings in the Township of Wallace, was completely destroyed by fire, one day last week.

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See article in *Cassell's Household Guide*, p. 9m.

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