

THE QUEEN'S VOW.

By JANIE O'BRIEN.

(Continued.)

"No one was in our secret, and we met frequently, unsuspected; though papa, thinking he was too presuming, had forbidden me to associate with him. One day we went out driving; the carriage was upset; I fainted; and for a long time I remembered nothing more.

"When reason returned, I was in a little cottage, nursed by an old woman; while he hovered by my bedside night and day. Then I learned that I had given birth to a child—dead and buried now. I could recollect myself as people recollect things in a confused dream—of hearing for a time the feeble cries of an infant, and seeing a baby face, with the large, black, beautiful eyes of Reginald Germaine. I thought, at the time, a strange, unaccountable change had come over him; though I could not tell what. When I was, again, I learned. Standing before me, one morning, he calmly and quietly told me how he had deceived me—that, instead of being a French count, he was the son of a strolling gipsy; but that, having repented of what he had done, he was willing to give me up.

"The very life seemed stricken out of my heart as I listened. Then my pride—the aroused pride of my race—arose; and, oh! words were weak to tell how I loathed myself and him. That I, a Percy—the daughter of a race that had mated with royalty hitherto—had fallen as low as to wed a gipsy! I shrank, in horror unspeakable, from the black, bottomless quagmire into which I had sunk. All my love in that instant turned to bitterest scorn, and I passionately bade him leave me, and never dare to come near me again, or breathe a word of the past. He obeyed; and from that day I never beheld him more.

"After that, I met you, Lord Ernest, and I loved you as I never loved him. For him, I cherished a wild, mad passion; for you, I felt the strong, earnest love of womanhood. You loved me; but I shrank from the affection my very soul was giving out for, knowing I dared not love you without guilt. Now you know the secret of my coldness and mysterious melancholy.

"I heard often of Germaine; and his name was like a spear-thrust to my heart. When I was told of his arrest, trial, and condemnation for grand larceny, you perhaps may imagine, but I can never tell exactly what I felt. His name was the theme of every tongue; and day after day I was forced to listen to the agonizing details, knowing—low as he had fallen, guilty as he might be—he was my husband still. Thank God! through all his ignominy, he had honor enough never to reveal our dark secret. Then came the news of his death; and Heaven forgive me, if my heart bounded as I heard it!

"O Lord Ernest! You were my first thought. I felt I could dare to love you now as you deserved to be loved, without sinning. I determined to tell you all, and to love you still, even though you spurned me from you forever. O Ernest, my noble-hearted! may God forever bless you for forgiving me as you have done, and loving me still!"

Her voice ceased, but the dark, eloquent eyes were full of untold love—of love that could never die for all time.

"My own!—my own! never so well beloved as now! My Maude! my bride! my wife! blot out from the leaves of your life that dark page—that year of passion, of sorrow and shame. We will never speak or think of it more, sweet Maude. Germaine has gone to answer for what he has done; if he has sinned while living, so also he has deeply suffered and sorrowed for it. Fiery, passionate and impulsive, if he has wronged others, so also he has been deeply wronged. May God forgive him!"

"And now, Maude what need of further delay? When shall this dear hand be mine?"

"Whenever you claim it, dear Ernest. I shall have no will but yours now," she answered, with all a woman's devotion in her deep eyes. "I am yours—yours through life, and beyond death if I may."

CHAPTER X.

THE VOICE OF COMING STORM.

"They spoke not a word, but like dumb statues or breathless stones, stared on each other and looked deadly pale."

—SHAKESPEARE.

"Oh, positively, your ladyship is looking perfectly dazzling! I never, no never, saw anybody half so beautiful in all my life! O Lady Kate! isn't she charming?" And little Miss Clara Jerningham, in an outburst of enthusiasm, earnestly clasped her little white hands, flashing with jewels, together, and went off into a look of ecstasy wonderful to behold.

Lady Kate McGregor, the proud, dark-eyed daughter of an impoverished Scottish nobleman, smiled quietly as she said:

"Lady Maude is always lovely, and like all brides, looks doubly so, now. How many of the gentlemen will envy Lord Villiers, to-night!"

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Clara, earnestly. "I am quite sure if I was a man (which, thank the gods! I am not), I would be tempted to shoot him, or do something else equally dreadful, for carrying off the reigning belle! I really don't see how any man in his proper senses could help falling in love with Maude. And yet there's brother George, now, he takes it as cool as—as I don't know what." The usual fate of Miss Clara's similes.

"So Captain Jerningham does not care?" said Lady Kate, in a voice not quite steady.

"No," answered Miss Clara, "no; which is a horrid proof of his insensibility. The fact is, George never was in love in his life, and never will be, as far as I can see. He will most likely die an old bachelor, if some rich heiress does not take pity on him, marry him, and pay his debts before long. Did you see the Duke of B.—this evening, Lady Kate? What a dear old creature it is! Going about shaking so, like a lot of *blanc mange*. I'm going to marry him some day for the family diamonds. Worth while, eh?"

"Miss Jerningham is herself the best judge of that," coldly replied Lady Kate, her handsome face growing proud and pale as she listened to Miss Clara's speech about her brother.

"Really, Lady Maude, it's my duty to tell you you are looking perfectly bewildering to-night, as all brides should look," said little Miss Clara, dancing off on a new tack. "This orange wreath and bridal veil are vastly becoming. I am sure no one would think you had been ill this morning to look at you now."

It was a pleasant scene on which the light of the rose-shaded chandelier fell. The superbly-furnished dressing room of Lady Maude Percy was all ablaze with numberless little jets of flame, which the innumerable mirrors magnified four fold. Priceless jewels lay carelessly strewn about on the inlaid dressing-table, mingled with rare bouquets, lace, gloves, and tiny satin slippers, that would scarcely have fitted Cinderella herself. Lady Kate McGregor, in white satin and point lace, stood leaning against the marble mantel, her handsome eyes growing cold and scornful whenever they rested on Miss Clara Jerningham. That frivolous little lady, quite bewildering in the same snow robes, was all unconscious of those icy glances, as she fluttered, like a butterfly over a rose, around another lady standing before a full length mirror.

It was Lady Maude Percy; and this was her bridal eve. Peerlessly lovely she looked as she stood there, with the light of a happy heart flushing her round cheeks, swelling her white bosom, and flushing from her dark, Syrian eyes. The bridal-dress she wore was worth a duke's ransom. It fell around her like a summer-cloud, three glistening folds of richest lace, so light, so gauzy, so brilliant, that it looked like a flashing mist. Diamonds that blinded the eyes with their insufferable light, rose and fell on her white bosom with every tumultuous throb of the heart beneath. Like a floating cloud fell over all the bridal veil, and glittering about it, rose the orange-wreath of rarest jewels.

It was one month after the interview recorded in the last chapter. Lord Villiers, with a lover's impatience, would consent to wait no longer; and as Lady Maude had not opposed him, this day had been fixed. The marriage was to have taken place at St. George's, in the morning; but early on that eventful day, the bride had been seized with so severe a headache, that she was unable to leave her room. Therefore, the ceremony had been necessarily delayed until the evening, when the august bishop of C., himself, was to come and perform the nuptial rite at the Percy mansion. Some were inclined to look upon this interruption in the light of an evil omen; but Lady Maude only smiled, and inwardly thought that, as his bride, nothing on earth could ever darken her life more. How little did she dream of the bitter cup of sorrow she was destined yet to drain to the dregs!

The old earl, her father, who was somewhat old-fashioned in his notions, and liked ancient customs kept up, had determined his daughter's bridal should be celebrated by the grandest ball of the season.

"I don't like this new-fangled way young people now-a-days have, of getting married in the morning, coming home for a hasty breakfast, and then tearing off, post-haste," said the old gentleman in strict confidence to Lord De Courcy. "It wasn't so in my time. Then we had all our friends assembled, and enjoyed ourselves together over a bottle or two of old wine until morning. Ah! those were the days."

Resolving, therefore, to keep up those halcyon days at all hazards, the great saloons of the stately hall were thrown open, and now they were filled with the elite of the city, waiting impatiently for the coming of the bride.

Lord Hugh De Courcy, suave, stately, courteous and bland, was there conversing with the father of the bride, and two or three of the most distinguished politicians of the day—his eyes now and then wandering from the faces of his friends, to rest proudly on the handsome form of his son, who, in the absence of Lady Maude, was the cynosure of all eyes, the "observed of all observers."

The venerable and high-salaried bishop attended by several other "journeymen soul-savers," as Captain George Jerningham irreverently called them, was there too, in full pontificals, all ready and waiting to tie the Gordian knot.

Handsome, stately and noble, Lord Villiers always looked; but more so now than ever. What man does not look well when happy, faultless in costume, and about to be married to the woman he loves!

Captain Jerningham, first groomsmen, was also looking remarkably well—a fact of which the young gentleman himself was well aware; and lounging in his usual listless attitude against a marble column, he languidly admired his aristocratically small foot in its shining boot.

(To be Continued.)

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DEPARTURES.

8 10 A. M.—From Water Street, St. John—

Express for points West and for Freder-

icton, St. Stephen, St. Andrews, Houlton

Woodstock, and all points North and South

3 30 P. M.—From Water Street, St. John—Ex-

press for Fredericton.

8 30 P. M.—From Water Street, St. John—Night

Express for points West, and for St. Stephen,

Woodstock, Houlton, and all points North,

and all points South.

2 00 P. M.—From Fredericton—Accommodation

for St. John.

6 25 A. M.—From Fredericton—Passenger and

Mail for St. John.

9 00 A. M.—From Fredericton for points West

North and South.

7 20 A. M.—From Gibson for Woodstock and

points North.

ARRIVALS:

6 30 A. M.—at St. John—Out Express Train from

all points West, and from St. Stephen, Wood-

stock, Houlton, and all points North.

10 10 A. M.—at St. John, Water Street—Express

from Fredericton.

5 40 P. M.—at St. John, Water Street—Express

from points West, and from St. Stephen, St.

Andrews, Woodstock, Houlton, Fredericton,

and all points North and South.

4 35 P. M.—At Fredericton, from McAdam and

points West, North and South.

7 00 P. M.—At Fredericton—Accommodation from

from St. John.

11 50 A. M.—At Fredericton—Passenger and Ma

from St. John.

5 35 P. M.—At Gibson from Woodstock and points

North.

2 30 P. M.—Pullman Sleeping Cars on Night Trains

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Through connections are made from Boston on

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Connection is made at Vancouver with trains of

the Maine Central Railway to and from