

A DREADFUL DISCOVERY.

(From the Family Herald.)

He hurried on our marriage. He wished it accomplished in as short a time as possible. My consent once given, I had no reason to delay, and my mother quite approved of the ceremony taking place at once. Charles had no relatives in England, and we knew no old or very intimate friends of his; so perhaps it may be a matter of wonderment that we should have, as it were, taken him on trust in this way; but, with his usual nice feeling and tact, he had sent his solicitor to call on us one day, and this gentleman, who was very pleasant and chatty, and most skilfully kept the object of his visit below the surface, spoke, in the course of a long and agreeable conversation, of having known Mr. Disney for some years, and, in the same passing and unconscious manner, paid high testimony to his worth, his character, and his wealth.

Thus was removed the last little cloud in the sky of our approval, and I began in earnest to get myself in readiness for the change that was to come upon me. Charles stayed in London most of the time, sitting down into Wiltshire now and then to overlook the preparations going on at Kenton Park ere the arrival of its mistress.

I did not care about the bustle of a wedding, nor did Charles. But he insisted on procuring me a fabulously beautiful dark velvet costume for the occasion; and in this, with light bonnet and gloves, and my mother and Helen Hilton in attendance—the father of the latter giving me away—I went out one fine spring morning and was married.

It was late in a lovely April afternoon that the open carriage bearing my husband and me from Dillcote railway station, after traversing four or five miles of most beautiful country, entered the gates of Kenton Park. I was perfectly astonished at the extent and beauty of the grounds. When we came in sight of the house, I beheld in my future home an imposing red-brick mansion planned with exquisite taste. It certainly far surpassed my brightest anticipations. Charles was seated beside me, holding my hand and looking eagerly into my face for my opinion on what I saw.

"It is as beautiful as fairyland!" I cried.

He raised my hand to his lips, and continued to gaze at me with the touching eagerness of affection that I had before remarked. Suddenly, as I looked smilingly back into his gay animated countenance, a change came over it. His eyes fell, the clasp of his hand relaxed, a black shadow swept across his features, arising I knew not whence, disappearing I knew not whither.

"Are you tired, dear Charles?" I asked. "I fear you do not feel well." He had averted his face, and seemed to be gazing away over the park. At my voice he turned, looking as bright as ever.

"Yes darling, I suppose I am a little tired. But the idea of talking of my being tired! Are you fatigued too?"

"I said 'No,' and did not altogether give credence to the cause that my question had assigned for the sudden dark cloud that had passed over my husband's face. In my own heart I attributed that transient gloom to his having for one moment remembered that I had confessed, in accepting him, that my first love had been for another. He loved me well enough, I knew, to make that a bitter thought at best.

We drew up to the front door. A small army of domestics was in waiting inside to curtsy and murmur respectful congratulations. At the rear of the crowd I discerned the face and shoulders of Martin, my husband's valet and general attendant. I knew this man through his having been in London with Charles the whole time of the latter's stay, and having often come to our house with messages, parcels, or notes during his master's courtship. He had been down to Kenton Park that morning to see that all was ready. In acknowledging the salutes of the other servants in, I hope, a sufficiently gracious and graceful manner, I happened to glance in the direction of Martin. His light gray eyes were fixed on me with an expression that, had not the idea seemed too wild and preposterous to be entertained, I should have thought betokened pity. On meeting my glance however he at once assumed the aspect of an irreproachable domestic, and hastened to tender his respectful wishes for our future happiness to his master and myself.

I was conducted at once to my boudoir to rest until dinner should be served, which would be in half an hour. Charles followed me in, glowing and radiant, and, as he came forward after closing the door, and I turned to thank him for his thoughtful love in providing such a lovely room for me, he folded me in his arms and cried—

"It is now my turn to say 'Welcome home.' welcome, my darling wife—ten thousand welcomes to the home you will turn to paradise!"

Time passed smoothly at Kenton Park. I soon settled down as Mistress of the large establishment. We rode, drove, and spent a good deal of time in the open air. We received and returned visits from some of the families in the neighbourhood; we read together, sang together in the evenings, and made the time fly pretty briskly.

Charles was an intensely devoted husband. He seemed to have no wish a far from me. It grieved me, though, to see him sit gloomy and silent, as he did sometimes; for then I was sure he was thinking of that earlier love I had told him of. His heart was so entirely mine that I knew it must grieve him to remember that mine had ever been another's. I knew it was another proof of his sweet nature, as I thought, that never by look or word did he express these bitter thoughts, and always tried to banish them when I knew them to be tormenting him. By extra gentleness and affection I always succeeded. He would take my hand and turn to me with a happy smile.

"Sweetheart—dear, dear wife, you are the sunshine and joy of my life!" he would say.

One autumn evening, some months after our marriage, as we sat in the drawing-room together, I at needlework and he reading, or supposed to be, he broke the silence that reigned in the room for some fifteen minutes.

"Mary," he said, "I did not tell you before we were married that I should have to go to town on business now and then, did I?"

"No Charles," I answered carelessly, intent on an elaborate rose in my wool-work. "Are you going soon, dear?"

"I am going," he replied slowly—and, on glancing up, I saw that he was gazing intently into the fire—"I am going to-morrow—at night."

"Very well, dear," I said cheerfully. "And am I to go too?"

"No, Mary love; I am merely going up on business. My stay is uncertain. You will remain here, dearest."

I was a little surprised at Charles's leaving me behind. I was also somewhat astonished at his manner, which was preoccupied and absent. Presently he broke the silence again.

"Ask your mother to stop with you, Mary, if you should be lonely and nervous," he suggested.

But something in the tone of his voice made me reply—

"No, Charles dear, I shall not be a bit lonely or nervous. When mamma comes to stay with us, it must be when you are at home."

The subject then dropped, and was not referred to again until late the next day. I asked him then by what train he was going to London, and named one a little before midnight.

"Shall you take Martin?" I inquired.

"No; he stays here," was my husband's reply.

"And you will write, of course, dear, and let me know about yourself?" I continued, leaning on the back of his chair.

"I may be too busy to write, dear," was his very unexpected rejoinder; "and my stay will be so uncertain that each day I shall be expecting to return."

"Why, Charles," I exclaimed in amazement; and then, with a suddenly dawning suspicion, I added, "Dear Charles, if you have difficulties of money or property, do repose confidence in me?"

He made no answer. His elbow was planted upon his knee, and his cheek resting on his hand, he gazed into the fire with a dark gloom spreading over his face.

"Charles, dear Charles," I pleaded, "tell me if you have any care that troubles you!"

Suddenly he turned and took me in his arms.

"Oh, my wife, my darling wife!" he cried, and said no more.

"Charles, you are strangely agitated. Confide in me, dear; please confide any trouble you have to me."

He held me from him and gazed into my face—oh, such a solemn, pathetic, melancholy gaze.

"You love me, Mary?" he asked.

"I do, Charles, dearly!"

"Thank heaven for that! I possess that treasure now, and it out balances all evils. I won it for myself. I would have died sooner than not win it. I did not do wrong; no one shall say I did wrong. I loved you so dearly, Mary!"

He seemed very excited; so I soothed him with loving words, and presently he grew calm.

I was almost certain now that he had sustained some money-losses, and that his agitation and burst of self-reproach sprang from the knowledge of it. Perhaps we were going to be quite poor. Well, poverty was not a very new or terrific prospect to me. Charles needed not, I thought, fear to tell me the worst. But it might be that he did not know the worst himself. Anyhow, I should soon hear it, I argued.

I was very lively and cheerful all that evening, and at eleven o'clock I saw my husband, his little travelling-bag in his hand, off at the front door.

"Good-bye, dearest," I said. If you really have not time to write, don't trouble yourself about it. Come back as soon as ever you can."

He made no answer, except by a passionate embrace; and then I went in and closed the door.

The servants were all long since gone to bed. I slowly mounted the wide staircase, and proceeded towards my own room. Martin passed me in the upper gallery, and, wishing me a respectful "Good-night," continued his way down-stairs to turn out the lights. Before he was out of sight I had entered my dressing-room and bolted the door.

I was not at all sleepy, and taking up a book, spent two hours or more in its perusal. By that time the fire had burned low. I was chilly and sleepy; so I closed my book and made up my mind to go to rest. Suddenly a strange feeling crept over me. It was vague, undefined, nameless; but it passed through me and left me weak, trembling, and as loose as the white wrapper I wore. I was never either a timid or nervous person; therefore it was all the more inexplicable.

"Pshaw!" I exclaimed bravely, beginning to take down my hair. "Nerves, my dear madam! You did not know that you possessed such things before, and to-night they think they're going to have an innings. But they are not, I can assure them!" And I continued undressing in a vigorous matter-of-fact way. "I have been anxious about Charles's affairs," I said to myself. I think he has lost money. Poor fellow, he is very troubled about something though he tries to hide it. Let me see—he must be half way to London by this time."

Talking prosaically thus, I composed myself to sleep. After a night of very broken rest and one or two visitations from the strange terror I had experienced before undressing, I was very glad at length to welcome the morning light.

I looked a little haggard and pale when I went down

to breakfast; but a stroll in the park soon set that right; and I came in to my solitary meal, looking as well as usual. I spent a busy day—writing letters, walking, driving, and wondering what Charles was about in London, looking out for a possible letter or telegram from him; and the evening drew on again. During the bright cheerful day I had not thought much of my disagreeable sensations the previous night; but when the brightness began to fade and the early darkness came, the experience recurred rather unpleasantly to my memory.

"I must not be silly," I said to myself repeatedly. "Why, Charles and mother would think me quite a baby if they knew! Afraid to be left alone for a day or two, and with a house full of servants too!"

So I shamed myself into stoicism, and, after an evening of very lively music on the piano in the great, bright, glittering, lonely drawing-room, I went to my room about half-past ten. I read for an hour, and then thinking determinedly of the book—a very commonplace but humorous one—I sought my pillow. I was trying with all my might to battle against the sensation, the presentiment, the feeling, part terror, part awe, part I knew not what, that was grappling with me hand to hand and foot to foot.

"What is it?" I cried, sitting up and looking round the room. "Am I a nervous fool, or is there something here that is beyond me?" I was trembling all over, and my hands were clammy and moist.

What was the presentiment, warning—call it what one will—that seemed striving with me and bidding me seek no rest? What was it? I did not know then. I do not know now. But, when I recall how over powering, how persistent it was, and to what it led me, I cover my face in awe and confess that there is something beyond our knowledge, for which our language has no name.

After a long, long torture from this vague warning terror—for that is the nearest approach I can give for its name—I dropped into a fitful sleep. It was then that my fears took a tangible, definite shape. I dreamed that a wild beast lay crouching in the dark hall below. I could see its fiery eyes shine through the blindness of the night; I could hear its breathing. I was huddled in a corner of the staircase, afraid to move. I fancied it would see me even without a light. If a board creaked, I was lost. I was fascinated by the terror of it. I dared not turn my gaze from these fiery balls. Gradually I fancied they were growing larger. They were approaching nearer—yes, nearer! It was creeping towards me. Oh, horror—ten thousand horrors! Would no one save me from this fearful death? In my agony of fear a board creaked, and it sprang towards me? With a scream, I started up, sitting in my bed; and a moment later, ere I was fully awake, I heard a voice—my own, but sounding strangely—ring through the room—

"Let me rise and sleep no more! There is a terror, a danger in this house I know not of!"

I rose and partly dressed myself. I did not know what I meant to do. But in that room I could not stay. It would be better to call upon my maid and get her to come and sit with me than to go on suffering such tortures as I had borne.

When I had put on a wrapper, I took a light and softly undid the door. The servants' rooms were up above; but, before going up, I went to the edge of the gallery, upon which my room opened, and forced myself to look down into the obscurity of the hall below. My will was as strong as ever, though my nerves were disporting themselves in a manner never before experienced. I gazed firmly down into the black abyss beneath me, and encountered no fiery eyes.

"There, you silly nervous coward!" I muttered reassuringly. "Everything is quite and safe; you'd better—" Here my self-addressed words came to a full stop.

Several doors opened upon the portion of the Hall into which I was peering through the darkness, one belonging to the dining-room, another to the breakfast-parlour, and a third giving admittance to my husband's study—a small and rather dreary apartment which I seldom entered; he had not used it much since his marriage.

Under the door of this last-named room I suddenly became aware of a faint light shining, which brought my commings to an abrupt close. Even as I noticed the light however, it disappeared; and I remained standing in the gallery, my lamp in my hand, gazing down into an impenetrable depth of darkness. I was uncertain whether or not my eyes had deceived me, and if they had not, whether I ought straightway to descend and investigate the matter.

To be continued.

A FINANCIAL ANECDOTE.

Theodore was a poor lad. One day when he was very hungry he espied a 5-cent piece on the floor of the broker's office, which he was sweeping out. He had remembered stories wherein little boys had picked up a small piece of money, handed it to the great merchant or rich banker and been immediately taken into partnership. So Theodore stepped up to the door of the broker's private room and said—

"Please, sir, here's a 5-cent piece I found on the floor." The broker looked at Theodore a moment and then said—

"You found that on my floor, did you? And you are hungry aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," replied Theodore.

"Well, give it to me and get out. I was looking around for a partner, but a boy who doesn't know enough to buy bread when he is starving to death would make but a sorry broker. No, boy, I can't take you into the firm."

And Theodore never became a great broker. Honesty is the best policy, children, but it is not indispensable to success in the brokerage business.