

THROUGH THORNY PATHS.

BY MARY ROWENA COTTER.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER XI.

For several minutes the voice of the officiating priest...

"I will," came the answer in a low tone.

But Cecelia heeded him not. Her eyelids drooped and Maurice put out his arm to support her...

"Miss Daton," he announced "has been taken seriously ill and unfortunately her marriage must be postponed."

The disappointed friends quickly dispersed, the first to leave the church being just in time to see the bridal carriage drive away...

"It is a peculiar case," said the physician, brought on by an overstrain on her weak nerves.

a sad, pleading face, the physician dared not speak thus plainly.

The words haunted Maurice for many a day. He had a vague presentiment that even if his life were to be spared, there might come a separation from her worse than death.

Many times a day Maurice called to inquire for her whose life hung by so slender a thread.

Remorse for what? Nothing, poor girl for which she was to blame, for Agnes had done all in her power to overcome her feelings towards him...

Nearly a week passed and still Cecelia showed no signs of throwing off her stupor.

"Agnes, what is the meaning of this, that you always act so strangely when Maurice Carroll comes here or his name is mentioned?"

"Do I, mother? I was not aware of it," and her face turned crimson.

thought so happy, has been suffering and I never suspected it.

"I mean that I have loved Maurice ever since the evening of our first reception and allowed him to remain in my mind when I knew that he was intended for Cecelia.

"I afterwards prayed earnestly for grace to overcome the love which I knew was not to be returned, and I think I could have conquered had not Cecelia gone to the convent.

"Poor Agnes," said her mother. "I am very sorry for you, but God has given you a bitter cross to bear which you can make a means of reward for eternity."

Mrs. Cullen stepped to the bedside to look at Cecelia, and was pleased to find her breathing more naturally while there was something like a smile on her face.

As if awakening from a slumber of only a few hours, Cecelia's senses returned as suddenly as they had left her, and finding herself in her own room she did not remember anything unusual that had happened until she heard the name of Maurice mentioned and heard her mother say that he had come to inquire for her.

"Agnes," she thought, "loves Maurice Carroll and can make him happy while I can never give him the love he deserves."

"I did it in obedience to those whom I felt knew better than I what was for my good, and I thought I could learn to love him in time."

"Cecelia will live," said the doctor when he came late that afternoon, "but for a few days she must be kept very quiet. No strangers are to be admitted to her room."

his child, who was happy to see him, but when she was told that Maurice was in the parlor the light faded from her eyes and she said:

"I cannot see him now." Cecelia improved much more rapidly than had been expected and seemed very happy, especially in the presence of Agnes, whom she wished to keep with her always.

"I know it, mother; but I was so weak." "Just as my sister Cecelia was years ago," thought Mrs. Cullen.

"I cannot see that you are forcing yourself upon him, Agnes, when you go to the parlor to please me."

"If it pleases you, Cecelia, I do not believe that it is so pleasant to him, and I wish you would go yourself when he calls again."

"Why not, Cecelia? This is a strange way to act towards your future husband. Here you have been receiving strangers, almost any one who wished to see you, but him you would not see."

"What do you mean, Cecelia?" "I mean that I can never marry him, that is all."

"Cecelia, do you mean to tell me that you promised to marry Maurice Carroll without loving him?" asked Agnes.

"That is a cruel question Agnes; but I must say that I never cared for him as more than a friend whom I highly respected, and since my illness I have felt it far more than ever."

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"Poor Maurice, how sorry I am for him," said Agnes. "It will be hard with him."

"It may for a time, but it will wear away and then he will marry another who can make him happy, as I never could."

The cousins understood each other better now, and both were happier after this conversation—Cecelia because she had, without betraying her knowledge of her cousin's secret, convinced her that as far as she herself was concerned, Maurice was free, and Agnes because she felt that if she did care for him she had been doing her cousin no great wrong.

large eyes shone with unusual brightness which reminded him that death had been very near her. But he had not expected to find so great a change in her.

"Now, Cecelia, that God has restored you to us, can you once more name the happy day of our marriage?"

"I cannot agree with you, Cecelia." "I am very sorry, but there will come a time when you can understand it better; then you will thank God that we were not married."

"Time can never change me. If I were like Cousin Agnes it would be different; she is a sweet, loving girl who could not fail to make your home happy, and I think you made a mistake that you did not try to win her instead of me."

Cecelia knew that she had made a strange remark, but she could not let pass this opportunity to speak a word for her cousin.

"Agnes, I know, is a good girl, but I chose the one I thought would make me the better wife."

"And made a fatal mistake. But thank God there is still time enough to have it corrected, so please take back your ring."

"No, Cecelia, it is yours and you shall keep it even if we never meet again. I wish you to wear it in remembrance of me."

"If you wish I shall keep it for friendship sake, on condition that our engagement be declared broken."

"It is hard, Cecelia, but if it is your earnest wish, let it be so."

He took his departure, and Cecelia went to the room where lay the wedding gifts, which she had not looked upon since her illness.

"Cecelia, what are you doing?" asked her mother. "What does this mean?"

"Simply this, mother, that I have no right to the presents intended for my wedding. I am sending them all back."

"This is very imprudent and an insult to your friends. You should have kept them until you are married."

charm the eye and enrapture the senses of his fellow-being, but there is nothing to be compared with the rustic beauties of nature.

"What you call an accident I look upon as a merciful act of Providence designed to prevent what might have been to both of us the beginning of many years of sorrow."

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At last finding courage to face the ordeal she had so dreaded, Cecelia went to the parlor to meet Maurice. She was very pale and thin, and her

CHAPTER XII. In this fair world of ours man has invented many a beautiful scene to

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