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CHAPTER XXI
 THE WEDDING IN THE FOG.

"The case excited a good deal of attention at the time, owing to the fact that the prisoner was the well-known accomplice of a notorious gang of swindlers and forgers, some of whom were even then serving out their well-merited terms of imprisonment. This woman—who was the reputed wife of one of the ringleaders of the gang, and who had evidently been the moving spirit of that nefarious circle—was suspected of even worse crimes still.

"Her supposed husband—between whom and herself some bitter quarrel was known to have arisen—had died under circumstances of a suspicious nature. The man, there was not a shadow of doubt, had fallen a victim to the schemes of a secret poisoner, and suspicion pointed at once to his wife, who, almost before the breath was out of his body, decamped with all the money and valuables she could lay her hands upon.

"When next heard of she was living in a snug little house at St. John's Wood, where she sometimes ran so high at her frequent supper parties as to attract the attention of the police, who finally succeeded in establishing her identity with the notorious Madame Rougement, of whom they had so long been in search.

"Of course there was an expose—a good many things came out at the trial—but by some means Ernest Warden's name was kept out of the papers. The woman who was taken from his side on his wedding day, to answer for her misdeeds at the bar of outraged justice, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment—a light sentence—too light, most people considered, for her deserts. But morally convincing though the proofs of her guilt were, there was still a difficulty about establishing it from a legal point of view, and she received the benefit of the doubt—if doubt it could be called—so far as the suspicion of murder and other grave offences were concerned.

"All this, my dear Miss Kendrick, happened ten years ago. In common with the rest of the world I read the history of the trial and consequent disclosures; but never until within the last few days had I again seen any of the actors in that dismal little drama in which I was so unwillingly called upon to play a part.

"At the picnic yesterday something about Mr. Warden struck me at once as familiar; later on I remembered him as the man whom I had married under such peculiar circumstances that dismal November day in London so long ago.

"Knowing what I did, I was surprised and pained to discover how matters stood between you two, and as a man and a theologian I felt it my duty to speak—to strive to save you from the life of misery into which I believed you to be innocently drifting. It is not my habit to interfere in matters that do not personally concern me; but in such a case as this I should have despaired myself could I have stood passively by and seen a woman's trust betrayed. It seems a cruel thing to tell you, but my dear Miss Kendrick, the man you love is a traitor! He is wooing you for his wife, knowing full well that he is already married!

"No, oh, no! There is a mistake somewhere—there must be!" Addie exclaimed, rising from her seat as he finished speaking, and stretching her hand with a piteous little gesture of entreaty toward him. "I do not dispute the truth of what you tell me, Mr. Smiles; but don't you see how it is? The woman to whom you married him is dead, she must be, or he would never have married—I mean he would never have asked me to love

him," she adds.
 "I wish I could believe that," he replies, looking at her with grave pity. "I would give a great deal to be able to leave you in that belief; but I am sorry to say that it is not so. Ernest Warden's wife still lives! She stood before us all last night. You saw her as well as the rest of us!"

"I!" she repeats, her whole frame quivering with agitation, her eyes dilated with fear. "Where?—who is she?"
 "The person who created such an excitement among us yesterday evening—changed as she is, and she is changed as happily few people ever change. I could swear to her identity anywhere—the madwoman at Ivy Cottage! She is the lawful wife of Ernest Warden!"

CHAPTER XXII
 A PROMISE OF SECRECY.

"ERNEST'S wife!" echoes Adelaide. "Oh, no, it can't be true! What, then, am I?"
 She totters forward, her face takes on the hue of the dead, and she falls like a log at my feet.

Mr. Smiles sees that the moment for his departure has come, and he silently glides out while I devote my energies to raising my sister from her swoon. At last the pale lips are parted, and Addie whispers: "Keep my secret, Lesley—only keep my secret; I ask no more!" They are the first frightened, half-incoherent words that break from her white lips.

"I can bear any and everything save the world's pity—anything but to have him blamed, and—oh, my love, my love, what have you done?" she gasps, a look of horror in her eyes as some startling thought comes flashing like lightning across her brain. "Lesley, it is a crime!" she adds, looking up at me with a face that is literally blanched of every particle of color. "It is bigamy! Don't you see; they might do something to him if it were known!"

"Hush, dear!" I reply, drawing the pale young face to my bosom and trying my best to comfort her. "Don't

think of him; he is not worth it! Try to forget him."

"Forget him!" she repeats, with a smile that wrings my heart. "Yes, dear, when I have forgotten myself! When I am in my grave, Lesley, I may forget Ernest Warden; I never shall before!"

"But think, Addie, does he deserve such love as this?" I ask.
 "I don't know, Lesley. I am a woman, and therefore I cannot reason; I can only feel!" is the weary reply. "He has wronged me. Do you think I don't know that?" she asks; "but whatever he has done, I would rather die this day than injure one hair of his dear head. You are the only person who knows anything of the marriage that took place yesterday—a marriage which, for his sake, I am determined to forget as if it had never been! Lesley," she cries, clutching my hands in a viselike grip, and looking into my face as if she would read my inmost soul, "promise to keep my secret—to tell no living soul, not even Len, that things have gone so far! Poor Len! He is quick-tempered; there might be a quarrel if he knew. Oh, Lesley, do you promise?"

"That or anything that can help to comfort you," I reply, glad to say or promise anything that can tend to soothe her distress.

With a sigh of relief she buries her white, anguish-stricken face in the pillow; and feeling how worse than useless in such a case as this all human sympathy must be, I leave her alone with her sorrow and go downstairs to make the best excuse I can for her absence.

Much as I long to comfort her, I feel that she would rather be alone with her misery. Therefore I refrain from intruding upon her as long as possible; and when at last I steal quietly back to the room, which henceforth we are to share in common, I find her precisely as I left her, lying motionless on the bed.

Her eyes are closed, and the white cheeks tearless; but, although I creep into bed as quietly as if I believed her asleep and feared to wake her, I know but too well that no such blessed relief as that can have come to her yet. She is very patient and still; but as I look into her tearless, white face in the morning, I know that she has slept but little during the night—perhaps not at all—wrestling through the long hours of darkness with her bitter grief, with no angel of hope to pour solace into her ear or balm into the poor, empty, aching heart.

She does not leave her room, an excuse of headache explains her absence

to Len; and, although I carry her up a cup of coffee, she seems too listless to moisten the pale lips that look so parched and drawn with pain.

By and by the necessity for action seems to strike her and to rouse her from her apathy. And later in the morning, on entering her room, I find her up and dressed as usual, just finishing a letter to Ernest Warden.

"Give him that when he comes, Lesley," she says, looking up at me with that stony calm on her face that is so much more eloquent of despair than all the tears that were ever shed.
 "I cannot trust myself to see him," she adds, as I take the note she offers me with a trembling hand. "I have told him what I have heard, and we must say good-by without meeting."

"But suppose he will not submit to this?" I ask, unable to contemplate my mission with other than doubt and misgiving.

"He must!" is the quiet reply. "The blow has been so sudden, and I have not had time yet to learn to bear it as I ought. Oh, Lesley!" she cries, the stony calm giving way all at once to a pitiful burst of tears, "it is too hard—too hard! Only yesterday I thought myself his wife. To-day and henceforth, through all the dreadful years to come, I know that we can be nothing to each other—less, a thousand times less than nothing!"

It is only too true what she says. Knowing as she does that Ernest Warden's degraded wife still lives—and I shudder as I think of that wretched lunatic who, while dragging out her own useless, purposeless life, stands a hideous bar to any hope of happiness for them—what can they ever be to each other any more? Sadly I go down stairs with the letter in my hand to wait with a sinking heart for Ernest Warden's daily visit.

At an earlier hour than usual he walks into the room, an eager, happy light in his handsome eyes as they search vain for the face that is generally the first to greet him.

"Where's Addie?" he asks, scarcely pausing to wish me good-morning. "Why, Lesley, what on earth is the matter? What are you looking so pale and solemn about? Gravity, isn't your forte, child, so fake my advice and don't attempt it," he adds, smilingly, unconscious of the trouble in store for him, of the blows about to fall.

Without a word, in spite of my efforts to speak, words refuse to come, I place the letter in his hand. As I look into his face, surprised and changed in a moment as if with some sudden dread, some secret premonition of evil, I remember the miserable wreck that fatal marriage has made of his life, and I feel that I cannot hate him as I ought to hate the man who has broken my sister's heart.

I stand quietly by, watching the working of his face as he snatches a hurried glance through the letter, and then, turning to the beginning, reads it slowly, deliberately through, from the first word to the last.

"So you know all about it, Lesley?" he asks, lifting a pair of sorrowful eyes to my face. "You know the story that meddling curate has told your sister?"

"Yes, all!" I reply. "Oh, why should you have brought this trouble upon us?" I cry, struggling with the pain and reproach with which my heart feels bursting. "The murderer who only strikes at the life of his victim is merciful compared with you, who could smile into the face of the woman who loved you, and break her heart!"

"Don't, Lesley! For the love of mercy, don't make it harder to bear than it is already!" he exclaimed, throwing his arms on the table and bowing his face upon it with a gesture of unutterable pain. "Think how bitter all this must be for me!"

"It is of Adelaide I am thinking, not of you," I reply, with a touch of the bitterness that still rankles in my heart. "You deserve no pity—you brought it all on yourself—knowing as you did from the very first that you had no right to ask any woman to be your wife! But she has been deceived—her trust betrayed—her happiness destroyed—and I cannot forgive you if she can!"

"You can hardly think worse of me than I think of myself, Lesley," he replies. "I don't deserve your pardon. I know that I have not a word to advance in self-defense, except that I loved her so well I could not give her up!"

"You never loved her, or you would not have brought all this misery upon her!" I reply.

(To be continued.)

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W. F. RENDELL, Lieut.-Col., Chief Staff Officer, Dept. Militia.



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