

THEIR GOLDEN WEDDING.

Full fifty years ago, When fell the Christmas snow, Two happy people took the vows that made them man and wife...



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CHAPTER II.—CONTINUED.

"This: In the hour I have been here you have found an untrodden way to the heart of Richard Somers. I know now that no woman was ever there before you; none will ever follow you. I may not be here to give you my hand...

"What would you have me answer you?" She was calm and confident now. At first she had shrunk a little from him. Her simple, confiding action restored to him his calmness.

"I would have you say at what hour it is you are accustomed to close the eyes which look down upon without seeing mine."

"At nine. But what is this upon your sleeve—a flower?" "A white rose for our wedding."

"With pretty show of authority she drew it from its resting place and fixed it in her hair."

"Do not flowers belong to the bride?" "Wear it in memory of me," he said, gently. "But now I am going to insist that you take steps to preserve those other roses which I am sure have bloomed for you. Have you a dressing-room?"

"Yes, but I am not sleepy and I shall not desert you. Wait. Speaking of the rose, I shall sing you a song I love very much—that is, if I can find my guitar. Ah, here it is! Now I'll sit here—and you right there—but I wonder if I can ever play in the dark? My I not have just a little light? It won't mind—"

"How easily you forget! It is impossible. Sing as you are; I shall not bear any discord." He was astonished at her swift change of mood and a new, glad note in her voice. She sang low and sweetly, with perfect control of her tones, the "Last Rose of Summer." And then he understood better. For in her voice he read that the soul and spirit of an impassioned woman dwelt in the slender frame veiled by the shadows of the room. He was silent. Every heartache that had been crushed out of his manhood seemed to have revived under the magic of a subtle tone, an indescribable, indefinable echo. It was a resurrection of something that had died hard within him.

"You do not like my singing," she said, disappointed, when, waiting for his praise, she found him silent and thoughtful.

"Your singing? Yes. But a memory! Go to sleep now. Make yourself comfortable and leave me to keep watch. Yet stay; will you not sing over those lines again? To me they are inexpressibly beautiful."

Standing in the doorway of her dressing-room, she sang the verse through again softly without accompaniment, waited until she was assured that he would not speak, and then passed thoughtfully within. When she came forth, arrayed in her wrapper, she paused beside him, puzzled over his change of mood.

"I am afraid you are going to be lonely," she said. "Sleep, my child, sleep; I shall not be lonely—knowing you are there."

"Perhaps I am keeping you awake?" "Yes. That is it; you are keeping me awake!"

"Well, I am holding out my hands and saying 'good night,'" she said. He found and pressed his lips upon them. He held them so tightly and trembled so violently she bent down over him confused. One of her curls, loosened, dropped upon his neck, and another across his cheek. The mingled odor of her hair and the rose filled him with a strange intoxication.

"I am sorry if I have distressed you in any way," she said; "you have been kind, oh, so kind to me. Good night." He still held her hands, his face bowed upon them, his form shaking with a strange emotion. "Good night," she said again. "If I do fall asleep and you are lonely—oh, sir, you hurt my hands."

"Good night," he whispered, hoarsely, recovering himself and releasing them. She crossed the room, and he saw her, dimly, standing by the bed, as though in doubt. And then she sank softly to her knees and laid her head upon her arms, child-wise, in prayer. He arose and stood until he saw her head lifted.

"Wait," he said, earnestly; "will you not pray also for me?" "I have prayed for you already," she answered.

"Will you tell me the prayer?" "Some time, perhaps, when it has been answered."

He thought then that she had fallen asleep, but after awhile she spoke again. "Will you let me ask you a question—of yourself again?"

"Yes, if you wish." "Dr. Brodnar said that you had never had but one ambition in life, and that you had been disappointed. What did he mean?"

"I once had ambition to be a great soldier. That is all." "Were you ever a soldier?" "Yes, an officer in the regular army."

"And now?" "I am a wanderer. A gentleman only." "Why did you leave the army?" "I struck my superior officer. They heard my defense and—let me resign."

"And the other—what became of him?" "He cheated at cards, was publicly insulted—and cashiered." "Why did you strike him?" "Is this asking a question?" "Oh, forgive me! Good night."

"It is very short," he said, repentantly. "There was a woman in the case; the card incident was but a pretext." A low cry escaped the girl. Then she said, half rising: "You loved her?"

"Yes." He heard her sink slowly back upon her pillow. "I thought so, at least—until now. I was mistaken in her; my pride was wounded." He arose and paced the room.

"Tell me of her, please?" "She lived not far from Washington with a relative, her parents both dead. She had some means of her own and frequently came into the city, where she had friends. We met, and I believed in her; but this officer came between us. She thought him rich, and I was deserted for him. She belonged to that class of women who esteem wealth the foremost object of life, women who go deliberately to men they do not, cannot love, or even respect, and say in effect: 'Here, we have beauty, youth, freshness, for sale. Take us, dress us, give us jewels and fine clothes to wear, carriages to ride in; give us a chance to command the homage of men, and all that we have is yours.' Watch for them upon your streets; all men know them at sight. God, but they pay at last! Look in when the excitement has passed and see upon their faces the frozen despair; see in the heaviness of their step the weight of a dead youth, and in their eyes eternal hopelessness. Child, child, be not deceived; love is the only gold that pays a woman. Shun them, these wretched advertisements of dishonor. Let no man come into the holiness of your life until love has sanctified the sacrifice." He ceased abruptly, and the next instant was kneeling by her side. "Forgive me!" he cried. "Have I not told you I hold you blameless?" Suddenly he

"Child, child, you do not know what you are saying!" He covered his face with his hand.

"Child! No, woman! You do not understand; it is you who are the child. Listen. I was not asleep when you struck a match and, turning your face from me, looked at your watch. I was awake, and I saw your face in the glass across the room."

"It was an accident, and I thanked God, for it has given me a living memory of the kindest friend since mother died. It is not the first time, for your picture is in the doctor's office. He did not know that I have hung over it—fixing it in my mind—many—many times—oh, will you, will you say that you wish to see me? Have you no wish to remember me?"

"Remember you? I shall carry with me forever the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, the perfume of every curl upon your head—"

"But my face! Will you look upon that? I release you from all your promises."

"I cannot! I cannot!" "Oh, sir, think what it will mean to me in all the lonely days to come, the memory of you and the consciousness that you carry in your heart sometime the face of the girl who—"

"It must not be. Remember your husband's honor! You promised to honor him. Is this the way?" "My husband! My husband!" she cried, half rising, "you have said it!" "Frances! Frances!"

"Ah, Frances! Say it all, Frances, my wife."

"Frances, my wife!" A passionate cry burst from the girl's lips.

"Yes, Frances, your wife. The woman who loves you, who has loved you from the day she saw your picture and heard your story! Oh, he never knew—he never dreamed it. Nothing can silence those words: 'Frances, my wife.' I will look upon your face, and you shall, you shall see mine! The matches—ah, they are here!"

"Hold!" he cried, huskily. "I should be unworthy of your love and trust if I could break my sacred promise. Look upon me if you will, but the eyes that would weep tears of joy to see you will be closed while the match is burning. Look, if I carry in memory the living record of one face will help you, take mine, and with it, right or wrong, the love of Richard Somers." She struck the match and held it above his lifted face, advancing her own and gazing eagerly upon him.

This strange experience preceded the dreams. Without a day's warning he had been plunged into the privacy of a young and modest woman's life, had become the guardian of her honor and in a measure of her future; and in a mysterious way the divine sweetness of her soul had issued forth and enveloped him. In the chiaroscuro of the still room he could just determine the outlines of her bed and upon its whiteness the outlines of her slender figure. He was glad that she slept; in that quiet falling asleep was for him the finest tribute ever paid to his manhood. A glad, quick pulse leaped from his heart as he realized this truth, and the words of the girl's mother, so artlessly repeated, came back to him.

Then in the desert of his life a stranger came before his tent and asked for shelter. He bade him enter. Why should not this scene be fixed and real and lasting? Would it be possible? Would the girl some day accept it as such, yielding still the trust and tenderness she had brought to the counterfeit? Was she trusting Brodnar? Or was she trusting him? The trust was in him. He felt it instinctively; and her little white hand seemed to steal forth to his again, her arms to enfold him. What a child she was! And yet—and yet—An irresistible impulse seized him to reach her, to touch her hand, her hair, and to pass within the electric radius of her presence again, if but for a moment. He was her guardian whether she slept or awoke.

A strange curiosity to be near a sleeping girl, to enter further into her life and absorb the sweetness of its innocence, possessed him. She would not know, she would never know, perhaps; and why should he not snatch from fate this one brief moment of happiness? A doubt assailed him and brought hesitation; but with an impatient gesture he threw aside the hesitation. He would not let even himself doubt himself.

And so he came and stood above the sleeper, and presently, entranced, he knelt and saw her lying there, vague, dim and unrecognizable, but a girl asleep. Her face was towards him upon the pillow and one hand lay upon the edge of her bed. So quietly did she sleep she seemed not to breathe. He watched her until a tremor shook him from head to foot, and a never before experienced confusion seized upon his mind. Instinctively he leaned above her hand and touched it with his lips—lightly, reverently. She sighed and spoke his name, and, overwhelmed with sudden dismay, he would have withdrawn, but she seized his arms and cried out:

"Light! light!" And then, brokenly: "Oh, sir, for the first time—I am—I am—frightened!" He sank his face beside her, overwhelmed with shame.

"It is half-past three," he said, brokenly; "I must soon say farewell to you—"

"Oh, sir, will you not light the gas?" Seeing that she still trembled, he arose and went to his chair.

"No," he said, calmly. "But sleep on. I shall not disturb you again." And then presently she came, and, kneeling in sudden abandon before him, placed her hands upon his shoulders, her face close into his.

"I shall not let you leave me thinking that I do not trust you," she said. "Oh, sir, kiss me now, my hands, my hair, my lips if you will. I trust implicitly! I trust you—yes, and more, I—"

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"Child! No, woman! You do not understand; it is you who are the child. Listen. I was not asleep when you struck a match and, turning your face from me, looked at your watch. I was awake, and I saw your face in the glass across the room."

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"Ah, again! again! My husband, my husband," she murmured. "It is the face of an angel!" The match grew short and the fatal red spark was showing in the flame when there came a flash of light in the window across the room, the quick, sharp report of a pistol rang out, and Richard Somers, reeling, plunged through her arms face down upon the floor.

The awful silence that followed the tragedy was broken at length by the faint whisper of the dazed and half-unconscious girl.

"Speak," she said, kneeling over the prostrate form; "why—what is the matter?—what has happened?" Her hands found his head and passed rapidly over it. "You do not answer me!" She drew slowly back from him, chilled with a great and unspeakable horror. Her hands were wet and slippery. Instinctively she knew it was blood. She could not rise nor cry out; her heart seemed paralyzed, her throat in the clutch of an invisible hand. The door opened silently, and the doctor's low voice was heard:

"Somers, Somers, the day is almost breaking." There was no response. He spoke again. Then the two figures became dimly visible. "What has happened?" he whispered, bending above them. He, too, felt the tell-tale blood upon his fingers as he touched the prostrate man, and, rising hastily, struck a match. Somers lay senseless before him, the young woman kneeling by his side staring speechlessly upon her bloody hands. His quick glance swept the room and rested upon her. The match fell to the floor and went out, leaving the scene to blacker darkness.

"Remorse!" he said, in a whisper, and was still. Rallying his faculties at length, Dr. Brodnar hurriedly lit the gas, and with his stern features contracted examined the fallen man and saw a wound back of the right temple from which the dark blood was still oozing.

"He has shot himself," he said. A moment he stood, with covered face, wavering in his tracks. Suddenly the enormity of the interests at stake flashed upon him and stupor gave way to intelligent action. Seizing a towel, he wiped the girl's hands and forced her into a chair.

"Stay there," he said, "and on your life do not cry out or leave the room before I return. Do you understand?" "Yes," she said, simply, and fixed her gaze upon the window. He bound the towel tightly about the head of the wounded man, lifted him in his arms as if he were a child, and passed out into the night. A few moments later the rush of wheels was heard upon the street.

"Some patient of the doctor's is worse," said a policeman upon a corner two squares away as the flying vehicle passed him.

[To Be Continued.]

A DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

One That Equaled the Miraculous Draught Described in the Bible.

One autumn day in the early '60's my father, then living at Mackinac island, received a letter from his partner, who had gone to get some pounds at Cross Village, 30 or 40 miles away to the southwest, writes W. D. Hulbert, in Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly.

"Send us some more barrels and salt," it said. "We're catching fish like thunder, and the fishermen are all crazy."

The tug was hastily loaded with salt and empty half-barrels, and was hurried away to Cross Village, to find the fishermen not quite crazy, but almost worn out with working night and day to care for the most wonderful run of fish that had been known for years—perhaps the greatest in the history of the fisheries.

"They're so thick in my pot," said one man, "that you can lay a plank down on them and walk on it."

It is related as an actual fact that six nets took, in 24 hours, an average of 20,000 pounds each. Every barrel and box was full, and fish were being salted down in skiffs and rowboats when the tug arrived. Of course it did not last long. A violent blow from the west drove the fish off shore; but the next morning the beach was covered with the spawn thrown up by the waves in some places a foot deep.

The Wisdom of the Wise. This is the story of a queen's counsel who, for many years, was the recognized leader of the Irish bar. The Green Bag prints it:

In his early days of wig and gown he got a case for his opinion. Possibly the solicitor thought it a very simple case; at all events, that was what the young lawyer thought, for after some study he took his pen and wrote: "I am clearly of opinion."

It so happened that as he sat in the law library the silver-haired Nestor of the Irish bar, a leader of unfathomable astuteness, chanced to look over his shoulder as he wrote.

"My dear young friend," the old lawyer said, softly, "never write that you are clearly of an opinion on a law point. The most you can hope to discover is the preponderance of the doubt."

Distinction. An eccentric and grandiloquent old Englishman was always ready with an answer when his long-suffering wife begged permission to mend holes and otherwise repair the ravages which time made upon his garments. "A hole, madam," he would say, with haughty decision, "is but the accident of a day. A darn, on the contrary, is premeditated poverty."—Youth's Companion.

Her Last Appeal. A Vienna paper relates an anecdote of the painter Makart, who was sometimes as taciturn as Von Moltke. One evening at a dinner he sat for an hour next to the soubrette Josephine Gallmeyer without uttering a word. Finally she lost patience and exclaimed: "Well, dear master, suppose we change the subject."

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"DEAR MRS. PINKHAM:—I was troubled very badly with inflammation of the bladder, was sick in bed with it. I had two doctors, but they did me no good. A friend gave me Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and it helped me. I have now taken three bottles of it, and I am entirely cured. It is a God-send to any woman, and I would recommend it to any one suffering as I was. I think, if most of the women would take more of your medicine instead of going to the doctors, they would be better off. The Compound has also cured my husband of kidney trouble."

Mrs. MABEL GOOKIN, Box 160, Mechanic Falls, Maine.

NERVOUS PROSTRATION.

"For two years I suffered from nervous prostration, the result of female weakness. I had leucorrhoea very badly, and at time of menstruation would be obliged to go to bed. Also suffered with headaches, pain across back, and in lower part of abdomen. I was so discouraged. I had read of Lydia E. Pinkham's Compound, and concluded to give it a trial. I wrote to Mrs. Pinkham, and received a very nice letter in return. I began at once the use of her Vegetable Compound and Blood Purifier, and am now feeling splendid. I have no more pain at monthly periods, can do my own work, and have gained ten pounds. I would not be without your Vegetable Compound. It is a splendid medicine. I am very thankful for what it has done for me."—Mrs. J. W. J., 76 Carolina Ave., Jamaica Plain, Mass.

If Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound will cure these women—why not you—you cannot tell until you try it. If you are ill, and really want to get well, commence its use at once, and do not let any drug clerk persuade you that he has something of his own which is better, for that is absurd. Ask him to produce the evidence we do.

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