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Parted by Fate

By LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

Author of "Parted at the Altar," "Lovely Maiden," "Florabel's Lover," "Ione," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER XXXIV Continued
"and the marriage," gasped Uldene, pale as death. "Has that taken place yet?"
"It is set for the evening of the 22nd, I believe," answered Miss Lennox, "and is, contrary to expectation, to take place somewhere down South at the bride's old home. It is to be a grand affair. Immediately after the ceremony, the happy couple will start for an extended tour through Europe. So the papers say, Ah, well, to be happy in this life is not for all of us," continued Miss Lennox with a deep sigh. "For example, I will read you an article in the paper immediately following the one I have just mentioned. It is quite racy," she declared, drawing her chair up closer by the bedside. "The headline reads: 'A scandal in High Life.' It will be sure to interest you."

Miss Lennox was a good little woman, but, like all her sex, she delighted in a spicy scandal, and she supposed, of course, it would interest her protégée. The sum and substance of the article was:
A handsome stranger had married a beautiful heiress, and for a time all went happy as a marriage bell. Suddenly a second wife appeared upon the scene, whom he had believed to have been lost at sea on a steamer which had been wrecked, and the beautiful heiress found out to her cost that she was no wife.

"It must be a terrible calamity to be placed in such a predicament," cried Miss Lennox, energetically. "Poor young bride! It was a thousand pities to blight her future so, for, of course, she had no claim upon him when it was learned he had another wife living."

How strangely like her own story was this. She said:
"When the poor wife whom he believed dead found him wedded to another, she should have gone quietly away out of his life forever."

"By no means," declared Miss Lennox, amazedly. "Why, she would be committing one of the gravest of crimes by keeping silent against both God's laws and man's; for the second marriage would be illegal, and she would be aware of that fact, while the husband and the bride were innocent of all intention of wrong. Why, did you ever hear of such a case, my dear?" asked Miss Lennox, curiously.

"No—yes, I—that is—no, certainly not," stammered Uldene, confusedly. All that long summer night Uldene was face to face with the terrible thought: Should she let the marriage go on, or should she not?

She had drifted into a terrible position,

and did not know how to extricate herself from it. She had awakened to the awful reality that her husband was going to marry another, while she herself was still alive—she, his lawful wife. She had wrecked his life and Verlie's once before. If she wrecked it a second time how they could hate her! But—
If she could but warn Rutledge that it must not be.

But he would want proofs as to why he must part from the bride he was about to lead to the altar; and the only proof which would bear the least weight would be to prevent herself in the flesh before him.

"Oh, God, teach me what to do, which way to turn!" she sobbed, wringing her little white hands wildly together.

CHAPTER XXXV. A FATAL MISTAKE.

Beautiful, unfortunate Uldene's grief was all the more poignant because she loved Rutledge so well; yet there was a reason, strong as life itself, and more bitter than death, why this hapless daughter, the last of an accursed race, dare not share Rutledge Chester's home and heart.

"Oh, God, what shall I do? Which way shall I turn?" she repeated, wringing her little white hands and raising her pale face to the pitiless night winds that drifted in with the moonlight through the open window. In the solemn hush of the midnight strange thoughts came to her. Why should Verlie be happy in his love while she was doomed to the darkness of cold despair?

It would not be so hard for Verlie to give him up as for her to lose him beyond recall—forever.

Why not go to Verlie, make herself known to her, bind her to a vow of eternal silence, and tell her all? Under the pitiful circumstances, Verlie would certainly see that she must never reveal herself to Rutledge.

How she would kneel at Verlie's feet and beg of her not to hate her for separating them.

Verlie was sweet and good as an angel. Uldene knew that she would clasp her white arms around her, and say, gently:

"Do not grieve for me, Uldene, darling. I will give him up to you without a murmur, since it is God's will. You are restored to us from the very grave; that will be recompense and solace enough for me."

Ah, yes, she must see Verlie and tell her all. She had no time to lose if she would save her. Uldene knew that her new-found friend would object most strenuously to her leaving the cottage in her present weak condition. She must steal cautiously away without her knowledge. Yes, that would be best.

Leaving a note to her, carefully pinned to the white pillow, in which she expressed her heartfelt gratitude for the kindness that had been shown her, and hoping the time might come when she could repay tenfold that kindness, Uldene stole silently away from the humble cottage, and from the kind woman who had indeed proven her friend in her hour of greatest need.

Uldene, faint and weak, pushed steadily on through the intense darkness which preceded the dawn, reaching the depot as the faint pink streak of early morning was tinting the gray of the eastern sky.

She was just in time. The southern express was within five minutes of starting. Uldene purchased her ticket, entered the car, and took her seat.

The sun rose in a flood of crimson and gold glory, traveled through the blue, hazy, cloudless sky, reached the zenith, passed it, and sank slowly toward the west. Still the train whirled on past green fields, small villages, woodland and stream. The dusk settled down, and the night crept on, and one by one the golden stars fixed themselves in the blue sky, and in the darkness of the night the train stopped at Uldene's destination.

Gathering her cloak closely about her, and drawing her veil down over her face, Uldene stepped from the car. The wharf was but a few blocks distant. She made her way to it without delay, looking furtively around for the long, weather-beaten building, or shed rather, that had always stood to the right of it, where little boats could be hired. It was not there now; it had been either torn down or the high tide had swept it away.

"A boat, miss? Was you looking for a boat?" exclaimed a voice at her elbow. "Yes," answered Uldene, anxiously. "I want to get over to Black-Tor Light-House. I do not need any one to row me over. I—I can handle the oars myself," she added, placing the usual fee in the man's hand.

"They are going to have a great time over to the old light-house to-night," said the boatman. "There's to be a grand wedding. Many a load of merry young folks I've carried over in my boat to-day."

"When is the ceremony to take place? At what hour, do you know?" asked Uldene, trembling in every limb.

"At ten, prompt. That is what I heard," he answered.

At that moment the clock in an adjoining steeple tolled the hour of eight.

Uldene took the oars in her white hands, and the little skiff shot out like an arrow into the blue, dancing waves. Once a desperate feeling came over her

to cling herself from the little boat down, down into the silvery, star-tipped waves, and let the marriage go on. Then a great thrill of joy filled her heart that it was in her power to prevent any other woman from being the bride of him whom she loved better than life itself.

At last the keel of the little boat touched the sand of the small island, and Uldene sprang ashore, drawing her boat into safety amongst the dense overhanging willows, and securing it to an iron staple.

This accomplished, she was about to turn towards the house, when a hurried, cautious, creeping footstep fell upon her ear, and an instant later the tall figure of a man emerged from the path into sight. The clear moonlight fell upon his dark, sinister face, revealing to Uldene the face of her mortal foe—the man who knew the horrible secret of the daughters of her race, and who had forced her to fly from her husband, if she would not have that story blazoned to the world.

"What was he doing here?" Uldene asked herself, breathless with horror. He stopped short, and gazed up at the brilliantly illuminated towers with a fierce light in his dark, threatening eyes. He was so near Uldene she could have reached out her white hand and touched him from where she crouched in such adject terror amongst the trees. She was in deadly fear lest he would hear the loud beating of her heart.

But no; he was too deeply engrossed in his own thoughts for that.

(To be Continued.)



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