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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 XXVII Continued

she had promised herself, after gazing upon the face that was dearer than life itself to her, she would go quietly away; but she found herself too weak to carry out her resolve. She must be near him though separated from him as far as the earth from the sun.

At the end of the second week a pitiful event happened that changed the current of three lives. One rainy morning, one of the shop boys of Madame Dubois brought Emily a large bundle of work from the establishment, with the message it might be completed at her home, if she preferred, as the young lady whom the work was for would call there, in the course of an hour, to give instructions concerning it.

"Oh, yes, it is the bridesmaid's dress that came in to Madame yesterday," said Miss Lennox, unwrapping the bundle, and disclosing to view soft, billowy folds of white surah silk and old point lace.

Uldene bent over it with a sigh. It brought with it such painful recollections of the life, so short and sweet, which she has put behind her forever.

"Beautiful! is it not?" said Emily. "And it is a beautiful young girl, indeed, who is to wear it. Yes, Miss Neddy Temple will look almost as sweet as the bride, I think."

"Neddy Temple?" How the name startled Uldene. "Miss Neddy will be very particular over it, I'm sure," pursued Emily, "for it is to be worn at one of the grandest weddings we have had this season. The bridegroom is handsome and very wealthy. He is the son of the late Senator Chester. Why, Miss Dean, what are you doing? You're dropping the ice water all over the beautiful white surah silk!" gasped Emily, in dismay, as she sprang to rescue it from Uldene's lap. "Are you going to faint, Miss Dean?" she asked, gazing anxiously into the beautiful white face. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I have seen a ghost of the past; it has confronted me," Uldene muttered silently to herself. But aloud she answered: "I did feel a little faint. I am better now. Have I ruined the surah silk?"

"I took it from you just in time to prevent your doing so," smiled Emily. "I was telling you about the wedding which this is to be worn at," she went on, holding the half-fashioned dress off at arm's length to admire it.

"It quite startled me when I read the announcement of handsome Rutledge Chester's approaching marriage. It carried me back to a pitiful paragraph I read in the papers about two years ago, about the death of his first bride. Ah, me! how time flies! Two years!"

"She lived in the great stone house on the hill, and they say she was as beautiful as a poet's dream—those who have seen her. I wonder that he could ever have forgotten her so far as to marry again, poor lady! Alas! nowadays they are scarcely off with the old love before they are on with the new."

"It was rumored a few months ago that Mr. Chester was to wed pretty Neddy Temple when they met abroad last year; but it seems that the rumor was false. He had another lady love in his mind's eye. As for Miss Neddy—"

Every man watches his balance in the bank, and his balance in his cash account, pretty closely. There is another ledger account that the average man entirely forgets to his own undoing. It is his account with death. It is more important than a "life and death" account, for it is a man's duty to himself and family to look up this account once every day and see that the balance is on the right side.

It doesn't pay to let this account run on, and have it debited with indigestion, and then impure blood, and finally nervous exhaustion, or prostration, or deadly consumption. When these diseases come it means a debit balance with death brought down in the blood red ink of another life sacrificed on the altar of foolish overwork and neglect of health. Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery makes the appetite keen, the digestion perfect, the liver active and the blood pure. It is the great blood-maker, flesh-builder and health-forgoer. It makes firm, healthy flesh, but does not produce corpulence or raise the weight above nature's normal. It cures 98 per cent. of all cases of consumption, bronchial, throat and catarrhal affections. Honest dealers don't urge substitutes.

"My wife had suffered for seven years with dyspepsia, sick headache and costiveness," writes Mr. Alonzo D. Jameson, of Dunbarton, Merrimack Co., N. H. "We tried many doctors and many kinds of medicine, but all were of no avail. We purchased six bottles of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, which together with the 'Pleasant Pellets,' has entirely restored my wife's health. We cannot say enough to you in thanks for these valuable medicines."

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Miss Dean, surely you are ill! You are going to faint."

"No!" muttered Uldene, piteously. But, despite her denial, she suddenly threw up her white hands and fell face downward in a death-like swoon to the floor at Emily's feet.

"Poor, tortured soul! she had borne all she could. Had her heart broken with one awful throb in her bosom at last?"

Quickly calling in her landlady from her room across the passage-way, Emily explained what had occurred in a few brief words, and they lost no time in disrobing Uldene and bearing her to her couch.

The usual remedies which they applied failed to bring back the fleeting breath to those pale lips, and, in alarm, the nearest physician was summoned.

"It's a bad case of brain fever, induced by some great and sudden shock," was the doctor's verdict, as he bent over beautiful, hapless Uldene. "I fear the young lady is destined to be confined to her bed for many a weary week."

"Is it dangerous? I mean, do you think she will die, sir?"

"It is a pretty severe case," replied the doctor, dubiously. "But while there is life there is hope. The chances are evenly balanced as to her recovery or—"

"Her death!" breathed Emily, in a low voice. The doctor nodded. If Emily could have read the future she would have prayed Heaven to take Uldene then and there.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PREPARATIONS FOR VERLIE'S WEDDING GO STEADILY ON.

Verlie Sefton's visit to the Renwick's was fast drawing to a close. On the following week she was to return to Richmond, Nela and Mark could spare their darling no longer.

Verlie had insisted upon a year's betrothal before she would name the wedding day; but her impatient, handsome lover would brook no delay.

"You must marry me at once, Verlie, my darling," he declared; "then this perpetual, haunting fear that I may lose you will be forever laid at rest."

He pleaded so eloquently, and she loved him so well, how could she refuse? And, at length, much to Rutledge's delight, the order for the wedding trousseau was given, and Verlie consented to become his bride as soon as all arrangements could be completed.

When Verlie wrote to Neddy Temple asking her to be one of the bridesmaids, Neddy had bent her dark, curly hair over the letter with a startled cry of dismay.

"Verlie—going to be married—to—Rutledge Chester!" she gasped. "I can hardly believe it. I should almost fancy poor Uldene's ghost would rise between them. Still, if he is bent upon marrying again, I would rather it would be Verlie who is to take Uldene's place in his heart than any one else."

Preparations for the marriage went steadily on.

Rutledge Chester had purchased one of the most magnificent villas on the avenue, and it was being rapidly put in readiness by the decorators and upholsterers for the occupancy of the bridal pair when they should return from their tour abroad.

There was one event which happened that annoyed Rutledge more than he cared to own.

He had crossed the lawn and was entering through one of the long French windows of the drawing-room, when he was suddenly brought to a standstill by the conversation of the decorators in an adjoining room.

He knew he should have made his presence known to them, for he was too honorable to play the part of an eaves-dropper; but the sound of his own name, and the words which followed after, held him spellbound.

"I'm afraid Mr. Chester's bride will find this rather an unlucky house for her," said one of the workmen to his companion. "You may laugh and sneer all you like, but I tell you omens are omens, and signs are signs. When a bird flies in through the open window of a house they are preparing for a bride, or a black cat strays in, look out for a tragedy, I say."

"Pshaw!" laughed his companion. "I don't believe in such nonsense. It's absurd."

"It is not nonsense," returned the first speaker; "it is a warning of impending evil, as I have actually experienced. A few years ago, I was decorating the walls of a beautiful house, which was being made ready to receive a lovely young bride, when, all of a sudden, a raven, black as night, fluttered in through the open window, quite in the same manner as the bird flew into the house to-day, and, as in this case, it made the tour of the whole house before it flew out again."

Here the man came to a full stop, breathing hard.

"Well, did anything come of that?" laughed his companion, good-naturedly. "This much came of it," returned the other, slowly; "as the bridal couple were crossing the threshold, surrounded by hundreds of gay, laughing friends following in the rear, a dark form sprang out from the shadow of the vestibule. Those nearest the groom and bride caught a fleeting glimpse of a woman's face, burning with the raging fire of

jealousy and hate. There was a startled scream—a pitiful groan. The bride fell back in the arms of her frantic bridegroom—dead—stricken to death by the small, white hand of a beautiful rival that had plunged, into her white breast, a long, thin, jeweled silver pin, which she had drawn from the meshes of her raven-dark hair. Yes, the bride fell dead on the threshold of the house she was never destined to occupy."

"So you think the presence of the bird foretold that tragedy?" asked the other, thoughtfully.

"I am sure of it," was the reply; "and that is not the first instance of the kind I have heard of, either. I could tell you of a score or more—"

Rutledge Chester waited to hear no more. With a white, set face, he turned on his heel and walked rapidly away. He tried to laugh the matter off, but somehow it troubled him, even though he told himself it was ridiculous folly for a person of sense to give one moment's thought to superstitious omens or signs.

"Nothing could happen to my beautiful Verlie," he muttered, impatiently. "I will forget the matter."

As he turned the corner of the avenue he beheld a natty little phaeton, drawn by a coal-black pony, whirling rapidly toward him.

Rutledge's heart beat with pleasure, and his face flushed as he saw that its occupants were Verlie and Neddy Temple.

Neddy's sharp eyes had been the first to discern him.

"Look who's coming, Verlie!" she exclaimed. "Good gracious! look at his face! It's the color of my flaming, red silk umbrella! He's blushing like a school-boy as his eyes fall upon you."

It was now Verlie's turn to smile and blush confusedly.

"Well, I never saw such a pair of lovers as you two are, anyhow," cried Neddy, laughing uproariously, much to Verlie's distress.

Neddy saw Rutledge had drawn close to the edge of the pavement, and was waiting for them to approach; and, seized with the irrepresible spirit of mischief that characterized her, she gasped the reins and the dainty ivory riding whip from Verlie's hand, and with a cut from the whip which the pony was not soon to forget they whirled with the velocity of the wind past Rutledge and on down the avenue, without giving him an instant of time in which to salute them.

"Oh, Neddy, you little vixen, he will feel so hurt about this," cried Verlie, as soon as she could regain her breath; but Neddy only laughed the more uproariously.

"He will have you to himself soon enough," she declared. "I was determined he should not have one single moment of your society this mornin'."

(To be Continued.)

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