

THEIR WEDDING DAY

By NELLIE CRAVEY GILLMORE

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Impelled by some whimsical notion, the girl turned abruptly and discarded the neat blue walking suit she had just donned for a heap of billowy, lustrous apparel that lay spread out over the bed.

No, her three years' absence on another continent had made very little difference beyond, perhaps, intensifying each feature a mere trifle. The sun tints of her hair had deepened to a more metallic gold, the blue of her eyes to misty violet, and her mouth, red, smoky lined, drooped a bare fraction at the corners—that was all.

With a final wistful glance at the straight young figure in its white alken levelness, she turned and ran down the stairs as fast as she could, pinning her hat on as she went.

Half an hour's brisk walking brought her to the entrance of the park. A few minutes later she found herself completely hemmed in by an unfamiliar wilderness of trees and brambles. She paused and looked about her desperately.

After a moment's rest on one of the benches she got up again, more than ever determined on her quest. At the end of a harassing hour she stood on familiar ground at last, a tumult of emotions surging all through her being as recollections crowded up thick and fast.

Lifting her skirts, all sagged and limp with dew, she picked her way



GORDON SLIPPED A STRONG ARM ABOUT HER AND DREW HER TOWARD HIM.

carefully to the sound end of it and sat down, catching her breath in a little spasm of relief. In the distance a coyote's cry sounded distinctly, and a whole army of minor echoes thronged in its wake.

The pink gray of early morning hung an enchanting rosiness over everything, and the air was suddenly vocal with the matutinal chirping of thousands of birds.

Presently the girl got up and began to search along the side of the log for something. She came to it at last. Any one looking at her just then could have detected that from the unmistakable signs of emotion all at once visible on her face.

"R. G. E. K., June, '02-June, '05." The letters, roughly carved with a pocketknife, were a trifle eaten away at the edges, but perfectly legible still.

"Our wedding day," she murmured softly, touching the crude inscription with a tender, tremulous finger. "Dick, Dick—if we only hadn't!" For a moment she felt as though she were going to choke. The memory of past bitterness—their quarrel, estrangement and final separation—came upon her suffocatingly, overwhelmingly. Then, with a swift access of pride, she threw back her head, the mist drying away from her eyes and leaving them half hard, half regretful, bright as stars.

For a full minute she stood there, tall and straight, immovable as a statue; then she bent suddenly and laid her cheek against the rough side of the log. Almost on the instant the sharp snapping of a twig brought her upright, with a startled movement. Not twenty feet away, just visible through the interlaced foliage, a man was striding rapidly toward her. The girl had just time to gather her skirts and slip noiselessly behind a screen of bamboo.

Despite its nonchalance, Gordon's careless swing had a decided purpose behind it. He came directly up to the crumbling old log and stood looking down upon its craggy surface with an

inextinguishable expression in his keen gray eyes.

Presently he, too, stooped and scanned closely along a certain line on the side of the log. In an instant his face lit up only to cloud swiftly, while a look of pain made his clean, clear features look almost sharp. He sat down and dropped his face in his hands with a sort of hopelessness too entire for expression. After a little he lifted his head wearily and stared straight ahead of him at nothing at all. Then, all at once, he started, paled and jumped to his feet, every nerve quivering. On the soft turf exactly in front of him were footprints—a woman's footprints! And a bit further on lay a tiny scrap of lace, vaguely exhalant of a subtle odor—her favorite perfume.

Gordon stooped quickly and possessed himself of the handkerchief. In one corner were the initials he already expected to see there. He crushed it against his lips with a passionate rush of tenderness, and a wonderful light came into his eyes. "Dearest of all women," he mused radiantly, "I shall go to the ends of creation to find you if it takes me all the eternities to do it!"

The girl held her hands tightly over her heart, lest Gordon should hear its turbulent throbbing. Her teeth, caught unconsciously over her lip, left a clean row of pink indentations for a long time afterward.

As he turned to come past her she shrank back a bit and her foot slipped fatally. The next moment Gordon was bending over her, and his breath, coming in little quick jerks, lifted the fine hair from her temples in tiny gold wisps.

"I'm afraid it's going to be serious, Dick. I don't believe I can walk a bit." Quite involuntarily she had reverted to the old familiar title.

The world seemed to stop revolving for a minute. Then Gordon slipped a firm, strong arm about her and drew her toward him. "I am going to carry you," he said.

"But it's too far. You could never in the world get me home."

"Less than a quarter of a mile from here is St. Luke's."

She laughed a little unsteadily, trying to smother the catch of pain in her throat.

"Mr. Applegate is there right now. I saw him as I came along," he continued.

"But I dislike to trouble any one with—"

"The reverend gentleman will not, I assure you, object to being troubled in this way. He likes it. You see, it rather helps him to eke out an existence. Besides, it wouldn't be precisely fair, would it, to cheat the old fellow out of his legitimate fee?"

The girl averted her head suddenly and did not speak, but Gordon took heart of her silence and, bending, touched her blood burnt cheeks with his lips. "You haven't forgotten what day this is, Emily?"

"I haven't forgotten," she responded in a little tremulous whisper, "it is our wedding day."

And so it was.

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