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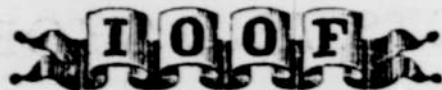
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Another Shadowed Altar—Betrothed, Wedded, Divorced.

BY "NED BUNTLINE."

"Is this the point? Are you sure that the beautiful stranger will pass here?"

"Yes. Each day for a week past she has galloped up this bridge path, on the same thoroughbred horse, riding with a fearless grace. She is beautiful in face, exquisite in form. By fair means or foul, I will possess her, for my very soul is in chains since I first set eyes upon her. I have striven in vain to learn who she is. Mounted as well as the best cavalier in the park, I sought to trace her home. Three times observing that I followed, she has eluded me—her horse far outstripping mine, and yet, each day, I see her here again and look on some beauty I had not seen before."

The two who thus conversed stood holding their horses by the side of one of the romantic bridge-paths in the Central Park. They were first-class gamblers, Leslie Durant and Frank Belpor by name, partners in one of the great gaming palaces of the city.

"You mean to force yourself on her acquaintance, if I understand you, Frank?" said the elder of the two.

"I do, and my plan is such that it cannot fail. You observe that vagabond boy, smoking a cigar beneath the tree nearly opposite. He smokes to keep fire ready for use. Watch his motion and mine, as you see the beautiful stranger approach, and you will read my plan and see it executed at the same time. Look! there she comes!"

A sharp whistle from Frank Belpor caused the vagabond boy to look alive, and as a lady with tresses of dark brown hair, floating loosely from beneath her jet black riding hat, galloped up the narrow roadway on a magnificent horse, the young wretch threw lighted fireworks in the path.

The horse, terrified, bounded to one side, so quickly too, that it seemed scarcely possible the beautiful rider could keep her seat—then as the young villain cast another glance directly beneath the animal, the horse, wild with delight, sprang forward, and dashed madly toward a point where a deep chasm yawned before it.

"Heavens!" cried Belpor, realizing the young lady's peril, "she is going to her death!"

She was almost on the edge of the chasm, when a man in the military garb of an officer, rose from the verge of the rock where he had been reclining, seized the horse by the bit with a giant's strength and held it rearing on the very verge of the cliff, till the lady slipped from the saddle and stood by his side.

"I owe you a life, sir," she said, in a low, tremulous tone. "I owe you a life, and I shall never forget it."

"Fair lady, the service I have had the happiness to render is a thousand times repaid by the thought that Providence placed me where I could prevent the sacrifice of such marvelous beauty. Pardon me—I, a soldier, reared afar from courtly scenes, may be rude and hasty in speech, but I would not be discourteous."

"I know it, sir, and as I see strangers approaching, will ask you to adjust my broken bridle rein, and to assist me to my saddle without their interference. This card, with my name and residence, will tell you where to call to receive from me a more fitting acknowledgment than I appreciate your courage and manly kindness."

She handed him the card just as Frank Belpor rode hastily up, and the latter saw the officer receive it.

His face was white—anger the cause of the palor, for another had rendered the service he had courted—another evidently received the encouragement he sighed for—the probable chance of a visiting acquaintance.

"I feared a terrible accident and rode hither to endeavor to avert it," he exclaimed.

"This gallant officer has nobly preserved me, and now renders the assistance of strangers unnecessary," said the lady, with cold dignity.

"Your bridle is ready, and I think your horse is now completely controllable," said the officer.

"Permit me to assist you, and at the same time to proffer my card, with my name and rank."

"Gratefully I accept both, and shall expect an early call," she said, as the officer lifted her to the saddle.

The gambler heard her words and saw the look which accompanied them, and his face was ghastly in his efforts to suppress the rage which filled his breast.

But he did not forget his intention to force an acquaintance, at all events and at all risks.

Suggesting that the lady's horse was not yet under safe control, he asked permission to escort her as she rode on.

With dignity the lady declined his offer on the ground that she did not need aid from a stranger, and preferred to ride alone.

Before he could say another word she was far away on her spirited animal.

Baffled, the angry gambler turned to the officer,

and demanded to see the card the lady had given. The demand was refused with the contempt it merited.

The foiled libertine, swearing to have satisfaction, demanded the card of the officer, who quietly gave it to him, with his address.

"Mother, I have met my destiny at last!"

It was the mysterious equestrienne of the Central Park who spoke.

Beautiful in an evening negligee, with her brown curling hair falling over full, sloping shoulders, her queenly form half concealed and half displayed in the loose robe she wore, her dark eyes full of enthusiasm, it was no wonder the mother gazed on her with proud admiration as she answered:

"Your destiny, Anna? What do you mean?"

That I have this day had a strange adventure, dear mother. I have looked death squarely in the face, and had it not been for the man whom I term my destiny, you would now be childless. I will tell you all by and by, but this I will say now; in him to whom I allude I have also found the first person in whom my heart in its inner throbbings has ever acknowledged an interest—the first whose voice has lingered on my ears after he was out of sight?"

"Anna, have you fallen in love, and with a stranger?"

"I am in love, I believe, mother, and with one whom I never saw until to-day. But he is not a stranger to me, to you, or to fame. He is an officer and a gentleman, one whose services have been acknowledged by deserved promotion, and who has made his mark with his pen as well as his sword!"

"His name, my daughter?"

"Colonel Edgar Mansfield, mother. Have you not seen it in print?"

"Yes, often; but tell me how, when and where you met him."

Anna Marston gave an account of the danger which she had escaped, and enthusiastically described the heroic conduct of her preserver.

"Mother," she said, at the close of her narration, "I looked down into his blue eyes while I flattered between life and death, and in their soulful depths I read my fate. In an instant I loved him with a love that will know no change but in death."

"Anna, my child, this is folly! To give your love before it is sought, is unmaidenly to say the least."

"Mother, it is the voice of Nature, and who shall still its pleadings? Till now I have been as ice to all who have sought my smiles—till now distrustful, believing that the heires, and not the woman, being wooed, should ne'er be won. But it is over. He will come to see me—he will woo—I shall accept, and I pray Heaven we shall be happy!"

At a later hour, when Mrs. Marston was alone in the drawing-room, a servant entered and said:

"Colonel Mansfield has called to see Miss Anna."

"Request him to walk in and I will gladly welcome him; then you may inform my daughter of his arrival."

The colonel entered, was received with a courtesy, a grateful kindness, which made that queenly matron nobly prepossessing in his sight.

The conversation, hinging much on the service he had been so happy as to render, continued until the rustle of her dress announced beautiful Anna Marston, our heroine. As he rose, she glided forward, and with hands extended to grasp his, exclaimed:

"I am so glad you have come so soon, that my dear mother may with myself join in a renewal of grateful expressions for—"

"A service which fortune threw in my way, and to which I hope my kind friend will make no further allusions, for by the honor of her acquaintance I am more than rewarded. I hope you feel no evil effect from the startling incident of the day!"

"None at all. And I can now explain to you how it occurred."

The reader, who has noted all the incidents of the plot laid by Belpor, needs no repetition of them here.

Colonel Mansfield listened, and with the keen perception of a man of the world, read the entire plot in all its dark details. And while he rejoiced at its failure, he warned the lady that bad men seldom give up a wicked plan because foiled at first, and that she must yet guard against peril from these men.

Urged on, they could not say why, or cared not to ask, each in turn confided to the other a knowledge of their respective positions.

The colonel, who had gained his rank in the volunteer service, was now about to enter the regular army as a captain of cavalry. He intended to do so, for in frontier and garrison duty he could find leisure to use his pen, and the income from that, added to his regular pay, would enable him to continue to support and educate an orphan sister—his dear little Pearl, then at the Rutgers Female College.

He informed Miss Marston that his sister would

graduate during the following week, and that it was his intention to then take her to the West with him.

"For, he added, "she is too young, too pure, to go out alone in contact with the world."

"When your dear sister graduates, I would like to have her here to live with me. Her room shall be next my own. Birds shall sing in every window, and flowers greet her eye on every side. Promise me, my preserver, that you will let her live with me, at least for a time?"

"I would be unjust to both you and her to refuse, and if you will, together we will visit her to-morrow, for it is Saturday, and she will be all day at home."

Anna, noble hearted, far above the selfishness of too many of the wealthy daughters of America, now revealed her soulful nature, as well as a part of her history.

"Do not think me bold, Colonel Mansfield," she said, "I do not mean to be. But I am, I fear, a spoiled child. Mother was left a widow when I was a very young, with an immense fortune in her hands, a large part of which became mine a year ago, when I became of age. She has had me educated at home, but has allowed me always to have my own way in everything. It has made me independent and willful, apt to speak just as I feel, and to act as I believe right. If I err, forgive me."

"Dear Miss Anna, your faults are the faults of an angel, and I can never see them. Were I wealthy, placed above the influences of that tide which ebbs and flows, carries poor humanity whither it wills, I would feel independent, and say more to you now than honor will permit. For to tell you that I love you, to ask you to give your love and hand to one unable to do more than to keep himself out of debt, and to raise and educate one sweet sister, would indeed be dishonorable."

"Edgar Mansfield, I drop all titles, scorn all cold ceremony, I hate conventionalities. I acknowledge that I love you—that nature whispers to me you are the one, the only one to whom I can confide the happiness of my life."

"Oh, Anna, is not this a dream?"

"No, Edgar Mansfield, it is real, and every word that I have uttered comes from my heart. The world, too cold to read hearts as hearts are, may not understand me, but you will. Love springs into existence even as volcanic fires leap from the snow-crowned mountain, and I love!"

This outburst of affection was succeeded by a cry of alarm. Anna Marston, raising her eyes to the curtain of the large window, fronting the parlor, saw a face which she immediately recognized. Her startled exclamation caused the owner of the face to fly, and pursuit was made in vain.

To account for the presence of this strange face at Miss Marston's window, it is necessary to return to the two gamblers. With bitter curses on his lips, Belpor rejoined his partner, Durant, and explained the manner in which Mansfield had saved the lady and how he had been literally refused an opportunity to make any acquaintance with her.

While he was threatening to challenge his rival, for such he mentally made him, the vagabond urchin who had shared in the work rushed up, demanding the five dollars which Belpor had promised him.

Belpor gave him the money, and the boy was about to run off when the gambler said:

"Not so fast, boy. I've more work for you. Do you see that officer walking toward the Drive? Well, I want him followed and watched. He'll go to his hotel first, that I am sure of. But after he comes out again, I want to know where he goes to, and I don't want him to know that he is watched. Do this and bring the information to my lodgings—here's my card, with the address—"

"All right, gov'nor," returned the boy, who was about to set forth on the mission, when Durant stopped him. The latter, who had been intently scrutinizing his face for some moments, fancied that he detected in his features a striking resemblance to those of a miserly millionaire who pretended to be a childless man.

"Boy, what is your name?" Durant asked.

"Awnings? That is a singular name. Why are you called Awnings?"

"Because I was found under a heap of awnings when I was a squaller. But you'd better let me run after that cove, if you don't want him to get out of sight before I start."

With a motion Durant assented, and the boy started in pursuit of Col. Mansfield. The result of his mission has been inferred by the reader, for it was Awnings's face that had startled Miss Marston when she beheld it gleaming at her through the window.

Her startled cry caused the boy to beat a hasty retreat, and with rapid footsteps he made his way to the gambler's dwelling to make his report.

Mr. Belpor was alone in his chamber when the boy entered, but was joined by Mr. Leslie Durant before he had time to speak.

"Well, have you followed that officer?" asked Belpor.

"I guess I have, and seen the lady too, and he was so lovely with her. I was 'in ten feet of 'em for an hour, and, gov'nor, the love they did talk I'd have heard more, but she seen me and I had to cut and run or they'd have nabbed me, and I guess I'd got gossins 'then!"

"Where does this lady live?"

"Why, close to Washington Square, where I got clubbed for stonin' sparrows."

"And you heard the officer and lady talk?" continued Belpor.

"You'd better believe I did. She said she loved him, and he said he loved her. And they looked as if they did."

"You have done well," said Belpor. "There is a ten-dollar bill for you—but the name of the lady, did you find that out?"

"Yes, he called her Miss Anna first, and then he got down to Anna all alone, and then he hitched on a handle, and it was dear Anna!"

"You heard no other name?"

"No."

"Then you will have to show me the house."

"Give me another X and I will."

"You little rascal! Have you no conscience?"

"I guess not—have you, so I can see what it's like?"

"He hits you again, Frank," said Durant, laughing. "I guess the boy has as much conscience as either you or I, and he would have precious little

at that. You had better give him the extra ten and make him clean up and get better clothes. I think when the dirt and rags are off, I'll remember who it is that he looks like."

"I'll give you another ten-dollar bill, but you must go and wash and get some better clothes on if I do, so you can go with me to the house. Will you do it?"

"In course I will. I'll ketch cold, maybe, takin' off the rough dirt, but it isn't no worse than the measles. I've had them."

"Can you get other clothes to-night?"

"Yes, night is just the time to work down on Water, or in Baxter street."

Col. Mansfield had just finished his morning toilet the day after the occurrences just narrated, when a servant brought up a card, and announced the gentleman whose name it bore as waiting below.

"Lieutenant Muggins!"—A singular name. I remember no such officer; but never mind—show him up!" said the Colonel.

In a couple of minutes Lieutenant Muggins entered. He was not in uniform. He wore a black frock-coat that was rather seedy. His clothes had been good and fashionable once, but it was "long, long ago." His face was not prepossessing. It had that brutalized look which the constant use of strong drink will give to any man. And yet there was something in his air, erect carriage, even in the manner in which he bowed as he lifted his hat, that said he had once been a gentleman.

"Is this your card, sir—are you Lieutenant Muggins?" asked the colonel, as he handed a chair to his visitor.

"That is my name, sir. Have I the honor to address Colonel Edgar Mansfield?" replied the other.

"My name is Mansfield, and I commanded the 1st cavalry during the late unpleasantness. May I ask to what branch of the service you are attached, as the lack of uniform does not permit me to judge without asking?"

"To none at present. I was in the infantry, but got sick and resigned. I have called, sir, on very disagreeable business, that as to any but us military men it would be disagreeable."

And Lieutenant Muggins straightened up, took out a very shabby-looking pocket book, and from it extracted a note.

Rising, he extended this to the colonel, and said:

"I have the honor, sir, to say that when you have taken note of the contents of that document, I shall be most happy to be referred to the friend whom you may select to arrange preliminaries."

The colonel took the note. It was unsealed. He read it and a sarcastic smile played over his features as he did so. It took but a few seconds, and then he quietly tore the missive into scraps and threw them on the floor.

"What am I to infer from that action, sir? What reply am I to take back to my friend, Mr. Frank Belpor?" cried Lieutenant Muggins.

"I have no reply to make to a man of his class and business," said the colonel, quietly. "When he dies, if justice is done, the hangman will expedite him on his route below. It is not work for a gentleman to do. If you remain here one minute more, Lieutenant Muggins, after the declaration that you are the friend of a gambler and a scoundrel, you will have the opportunity of saying that I consdescended to kick you out of my room."

"You would kick me—me, sir? I'll—P—"

"Well, sir, what will you do?"

And Colonel Mansfield rose from his chair, and began with a slow, measured step to advance toward the lieutenant, whose face was very red—almost purple—but now began to whiten.

"I'll go, sir, without being kicked, so to tell him you refuse to fight; and he'll post you, sir, and chastise you, too! Maybe you'll kick him!"

The lieutenant was hurrying over the threshold when he said this, and as his face was yet turned toward what he deemed the point of attack—that is, the end of the colonel's heavy cavalry boot—he did not see where he was going, and, being at the head of a flight of stairs, he made an unexpectedly rapid descent.

All the colonel saw of him was his heels as they went up and the head went down.

He felt no great anxiety about his fate, however, and finishing his toilet, started shortly afterward to meet his dear young sister.

Major L., his worthy host, smiled as he passed out, and remarked, quietly:

"You made a ten-strike a little while ago, colonel. I knew what was up, and was glad to see you end the game as you did." The continuation of "The Shadowed Altar" will be found in No. 17 of the NEW YORK WEEKLY, now ready, and for sale by every news agent throughout the country. Specimen copies sent free from the publication office. Every postmaster throughout the country has a specimen copy now on exhibition. The terms to mail subscribers are: Single copy, one year, \$3; four copies (2 50 each), \$10; and nine copies (money all sent at one time), \$20. Getters up ad clubs can afterward add subscribers at \$2 50 each. The LITERARY ALBUM (a large illustrated weekly journal, containing only first-class original reading matter, price \$4 00 per annum.) will be sent with the N. Y. WEEKLY at \$6 00 per annum for both publications. All letters must be directed to STREET & SMITH, P. O. Box No. 4896, N. Y. One of Ned Buntline's admirers, after reading the opening part of "THE SHADOWED ALTAR," was so much delighted with it that in a burst of enthusiasm he dashed off the following lines:

Oh, listen, maidens, listen—
A story I will tell
About a loving couple—
A dashing beau and belle.
I'll speak of their betrothal—
Their wedding and its cost—
Their troubles and their trials—
And how they were divorced.

Shoo Fly! Don't bother me!
Shoo Fly! Don't bother me!
Shoo Fly! Don't bother me!
For I must read the GAZET WEEKLY!

I feel like telling sister—
I feel like telling ma—
I feel like telling brother—
I feel like telling pa—
I feel like telling Cousin Sue
And handsome Cousin Walter—
I feel like telling every one
To read the SHADOWED ALTAR.