



Harry Burton.

TRUE FRIENDSHIP'S SACRIFICE

A Romance of the War.

BY OTWEL.

AUTHOR OF "BESSIE'S DIARY," ETC.

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CHAPTER XX.

Colonel Warren all had some time after this to escape before he presented himself at the Desmond mansion, and set his card to Pearl.

As she entered the room he rose and offered her a chair with as much deference as he would had she been a prince.

She was pale as death and looked terribly ill, but managed to greet him calmly as usual.

"Dear Miss Bedford," he began in a tone of respectful sympathy. "I have but just returned from Chicago, where I was called upon important business. I saw in the exchanges while there, news which was most startling, news that I should have kept from your knowledge had I been here, and had such a thing been possible; but I see it has resulted in your face. I need not ask if you know all."

She did not answer and he continued.

"I may as well say all I have to say concerning the terrible tragedy now, and then Pearl you must try and forget it all if you can. At first I was too much startled and I may say shocked to doubt the truthfulness of the statement, but after calmer thought I concluded it would be at least wise to investigate the matter. How to do this satisfactorily was the next question that arose in my mind, for it seemed impossible to leave the business which had brought me to Chicago, and which was very necessary to have arranged immediately. But upon inquiry I found that by taking a night train for I—the station near where the disaster was reported to have occurred—I could go there, and by returning by night train also, only lose one day. So having obtained a leave of absence from my business patrons, I boarded the express bound for I—at half-past eight in the evening and prepared to pass the night as comfortably as possible, but I need not tell you that my ride was far from pleasant, for being the only passenger the train boy did not seem to think it at all important to keep a fire, and I found my great coat hardly sufficient protection against a cold that carried the mercury away down into twenties. However, I arrived safely and felt no bad results from my frigid ride. I found I—to be a miserable little hole of a town, or village, where after eating an indifferent breakfast at the only hotel, I started out to make my investigations. I visited the scene of the disaster; but I need not describe the place nor relate to you the horrible picture that arose in my mind as I gazed at the debris upon the rocky cliffs perhaps a hundred feet below me as I stood upon the new trestle that had replaced the one that had gone down loaded with human souls, sending some of them suddenly into eternity, others to follow them after hours of hideous torture and others to live lives of pain and helplessness. I do not like to dwell upon the thoughts that came over me just then, or do I like to think of the after experiences of that day. It is only necessary for me to tell you that I found the statements in the papers more correct than newspaper reports generally are. I called this morning to give you this paper—it is an article signed by the mayor of I—declaring the identity of—the person who was killed, and to extend my help and sympathy to you if it is required."

"Colonel, I am overwhelmed with gratitude," said Pearl brokenly. "You could do all this for me. Surely you deserve your reward."

"Pearl whatever I have done was done without hope of reward. If there is anything in this world that I can do for you at any time you have only to command me."

"You have done all that is necessary to do for me. You have now only to take your reward, which I wish was more worthy of you. I have been thinking lately, Colonel, that I have been very selfish, that I have thought more of my own happiness than that of others, and I want to atone for the past by devoting the rest of my life to others. I am willing to be your wife if you want what remains of Pearl Bedford."

"Pearl, is it possible? Can it be true?" said the colonel in a trembling voice, which was not assumed, and he covered his face with his handkerchief to conceal the gleam of triumph which lit up his face with a light almost man a in its brightness. "Can heaven be so kind to me?" he continued after he had controlled his feelings sufficiently to speak in his usual voice. "Can I, may I say my Pearl?"

"His question seemed to arouse Pearl from a deep sad reverie, for

after making the declaration to be his wife she had turned away, and her thoughts were evidently not of the present.

"Yes, yes," she said quickly, "I have not said so? Have I not said I would marry you? Have you anything more to say to me—may I now be spared further excitement to-day?"

"Ah, how much I have to say to you my Pearl. But now that you are mine I can wait. Go my darling obtain the rest you seem to require. I entreat you my loved one, to seek repose of mind and body. Quickly re-establish your health that at least before death we may be able to say we were many days happy together."

He led her across the room and opened the door for her to pass out. As she stepped across the threshold he stooped and planted a burning kiss upon her brow, murmuring with subdued passion, "mine! mine! mine at last!"

Pearl shrank from him with a strange feeling of aversion, and with burning cheeks sought the seclusion of her own apartment, thankful to find Nellie absent just then.

"Have I done right? Have I done my duty?" she exclaimed. "I am his promised wife, but oh, my father in heaven pity me for I hate him, oh, I hate him!" She fell into a chair near the window and leaning her head against the cushion looked out into the rapidly deepening wintry twilight.

"Like this gloomy twilight last fading into a night, cold dark and dreary in my life," she moaned. "Must I live in utter despair? Every ray of light has faded from my sight. Every hope is broken. My heart is empty and yet I cannot die. Oh, Papa, why can I not come to you? Oh, Lord it is enough, now let me die. It is enough," she repeated over and over again unconsciously waiting Elijah's plea. "It is enough, it is enough!"

A peal of girlish laughter floated up to her from the rooms below; then a bar of "Twickenham's Ferry" sounded along the stairway.

"Ab, Nellie dear," she sighed. "God grant that your bright life be not blighted as mine has been. Who would believe I once could laugh and sing like that?"

Light feet kept time to the merry music down the long hall; then the girlish treble ended in a whistle, and then "Pearl on Pearl at the peary gates ajar please. Why you naughty, naughty child sitting here in the darkness alone. And my goodness!" she exclaimed when she had turned up the gas.

"You are as blue as indigo, and swerving too. Whatever is to come of you when I have gone and you have no grandma to take care of you I don't know." She rang the bell and while the servant was undulating the roaring blazing fire which she ordered she proceeded to give him what she called a good scolding for neglecting his mistress's beauty and comfort.

She bustled about, drawing down the blinds, and wheeling a large easy chair in front of the cheerful fire, she had carried Pearl to the comfortable seat, and seated herself on an ottoman near by.

"Now Pearl are you comfortable? Then please lend me your ears. My head actually aches with overabundance of intelligence it contains; and my heart is ready to burst with happiness."

I have just received a letter from my "man of the mountain," and he is coming home in April—and with many bushes, "he begs me to marry him in May."

"And of course, could I refuse him anything?"

"Dear little grandma," said Pearl patting the glowing check lovingly, "My dear lovely, lovely and loved friend may you ever be as happy as you are now. Mr. Paul Rubell is to be congratulated. I wonder if he fully realizes what a bright little sunbeam is to shine upon his life from May time on," then after a pause she said, "I too Nellie have something to tell. I am to be married."

"Oh! Pearl, I am so glad," said Nellie clapping her hands. "Tell me quick. It's so romantic."

"There is nothing to tell," returned Pearl slowly, "only that I promised to marry Colonel Warren. No do not congratulate. There dear! do not wish me happiness."

"Oh, but Pearl you will be, once you are married. The Colonel is so noble, so grand, he loves you so much, you cannot help but be happy."

"At least I cannot be very unhappy while my light hearted Nellie is with me."

"And Oh, Pearl!" cried Nellie, excitedly, "we will have a double wedding, with bridesmaids, and we will have dresses alike, and won't it be grand?" she jumped up and went whirling around the room in an ecstasy of delight.

"And, Pearl," she gasped, when at last she was obliged to stand still from sheer want of breath, "Pearl, do you know this is the last of February? I must go right home, and you will go with me—there, don't open your lips to say no, for I must have my own way, you know. And we will prepare our trousseau together, and you will take your sister with you, she has such exquisite taste; and mamma will be

delighted, and she will help us. And Pearl, Pearl, I am just too utterly, awfully happy!" and she went whirling around the room again.

And Nellie did have her "own way" in this as in all other projects she undertook. The colonel, of course, was only too anxious to second any arrangement to hasten his own wedding, and Mrs. Desmond was easily persuaded to assist in so brilliant an alliance for her niece. Mr. Desmond was only his wife's echo in this, as in all other matters, so the only resistance Nellie had to contend against were Pearl's feeble protests, and these were easily overcome.

"After all," Pearl argued to herself, "what did it matter?" She had given her promise, and she would as soon think of cutting off her right hand as of breaking her promise which she was able to fulfill. What did it matter if the marriage took place sooner or later? It was all the same, and perhaps it would be better soon, after she should repeat giving that promise. And Nellie's plans offered a release from the colonel's hated presence for a time at least. For, try as hard as she might, she could deceive herself no longer as to her feelings for the colonel. She trembled with feelings of horror when she thought of her life to come with him.

Yet she had no idea of shrinking from duty now. To Pearl a sacrifice given grudgingly and complainingly was no sacrifice at all. She had made up her mind to be cheerful, and she resolved over and over again with God's help to be a pleasant and agreeable wife, and to make the most of her ruined life. Even if her heart broke and her life went out under the terrible trial, she would feel that she had done her duty, done her utmost to atone; and she imagined her father looking down upon her approvingly.

"Oh, Daddy, darling!" she groaned, "had I made this little sacrifice years ago you would not now be murdered and lying in the grave. No, you would be here to bless and comfort me now. But, dear daddy, you will forgive me now, for now you can look down from your spirit home into my heart and see how I loved him—oh, how I loved him!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The wedding day was rapidly approaching. Nellie had arranged everything from the beginning; and had named the fifteenth day of May for the grand event.

There was to be a double wedding in the church, with trains of brides maids, and best men for each couple. Afterwards a grand reception at Nellie's home. Then they were to start upon a short wedding tour to the West coast, bride-cakes, best men and all were to go. Returning, they were to visit a month at the home of Mr. Rubell's parents in Vermont; then some length of time at the Desmond mansion in St. Louis. Then Mr. and Mrs. Rubell were to commence housekeeping in Boston and the Colonel and Pearl would reside at the Colonel's country seat near St. Louis. Thus far Pearl had only to wait with the tide, or rather to whirl round with the eddies; for Nellie ordered every thing with a lavish hand, and to Pearl the last two months had seemed only one endless shopping expedition. Mrs. Desmond had made discussions regarding pearls, satin lavender, and marve silk, ashes of roses, and violet silk, cream crepe, and English mullet, and the upper rooms of the Nelson residence were all transformed into a dressmaking and millinery establishment. But Pearl had only to smile, and to say this was beautiful, or that was lovely, or something else was splendid, and to stand patiently by the hour to be fitted and pronounced an angel.

But now the shopping, and the fitting were all over and the great trunks were being packed, while the house was undergoing a great transformation preparatory to the grand reception.

Colonel Warren had come from St. Louis, and was stopping at the hotel only a few blocks away, and Mr. Rubell had arrived from Italy and was in constant attendance upon his lady love. There was a genuine love match. They had met while Nellie was abroad with Pearl, and Paul was an artist, studying and traveling in Italy. As they had first met at a little wayside inn upon a picturesque mountain side, Nellie had persisted in calling him her "man of the mountain," ever since.

He had been a sympathetic listener to Nellie's pathetic little story of her lily faced friend, and it was Pearl's face he painted for his Madonnas and angels, while Nellie's rosy features represented his flower girls and other characters with less spirituelle faces than Pearl's.

Pearl would have preferred a quieter wedding; but if all this ostentation pleased Nellie why not submit? She was living for others now, so what did it matter?

Mrs. Desmond was delighted with all the fine display; and the Colonel seemed almost wild with happiness; in fact every hour spent

in his company Pearl became more frightened of him. His love for her seemed so intense, almost fierce Pearl thought, and she shrank from the strange glitter in her eyes. But when she mentioned her fears to Nellie she was only laughed at, and called a little simpation.

"Why you goose it is only because he loves you so much, and that he has such black eyes. It's the nature of such temperaments to love ardently. You ought to feel flattered. I would give anything if Paul loved me like that. I get vexed at his cool way of taking my love for granted, and am tempted to flirt a little just to make him jealous."

"Oh don't do it Nell. He loves you sincerely I know."

"Oh I am not going to; I only say I am tempted to. I know he loves me; and then I could not flirt or act any thing out of my own natural self if I tried."

And so the wedding day came. And the earth did not fall, nor the sun refuse to shine. On the contrary he beamed in at Pearl's window as radiantly as if she was the happiest bride to be, in the world.

If there remained a lingering hope in her heart that this marriage would by some unseen power be averted, such hope was dispelled this morning.

"My Heavenly Father," she prayed, as she arose from her sleepless couch, and knelt by its side. "My God, my only strength, and help on earth forsake me not. Help me to bear this terrible, aw trial. Oh, Lord! how must have some purpose in causing me to live when oh, it would be such a pleasure to die," and with this thought came a little comfort.

"It would have been so easy for me to have crushed my life out that other mid May day. Oh! of all days that Nellie should choose this."

It was upon mid May day that her love, her brief happiness had come to her; and because of that love all this sorrow and suffering had come.

"Oh Harry, had you let me die then, this terrible sin and suffering would never have been. But oh, I must not think of the past. I must not be alone to-day or I will go mad."

(To be Continued.)

Which Was It—Acne or Shakespear

The authorship of the dramatic productions contributed to the last of the above named is agitating literary circles to the very centre but affects the practical masses far less than the momentous question, how to regain or preserve health, that essential of bodily and mental activity, business success and the "pursuit of happiness."

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