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The Two Loves of Gilbert Graves.

A face soft, confiding and innocent was Mary Plympton's before the calamity from which she suffered came to mar her perfection. Alas, for her, that her happiness should have depended upon this face alone; and sadder than all that her love should have been given to Gilbert Graves, and that she should have relied for the duration of that happiness upon the continuance of his love.

At a time when Mary was most cheerful and most hopeful of the future a dreadful sickness came upon her. When she had recovered her health and was enabled to sit up and converse, she felt that that had left her which, in the beginning had won Gilbert's heart. The beauty of her face had departed, and its fair white face pitted with the traces of the disease. Her first thought, as for the first time since her loss was manifest, she look in the mirror at her scarred countenance, was, "Will Gilbert love me now?"

A prophetic burst of tears was the answer to her thoughts. And as she progressed to strength and full recovery the question that she had asked herself with tears for an answer, was ever uppermost in her mind—"Will Gilbert love me now?"

In due course of time it was announced to her friends that she was quite strong and well again. She had written to her lover, making him aware of her calamity; but no answer had been returned to her letter. Many days had elapsed since her recovery, and still Gilbert Graves remained away from her. There were those about her who sought to persuade her that he had ceased to love her, and that her duty was to forget one who was so little worthy; but her heart pleaded for the absent one, and as the days went by the longing to see him became stronger, and in her unshaken faith in his honor, and in his love for her, she found consolation in framing to herself a hundred palliating reasons for his absence.

One day, sitting in the parlor with her longing and her loneliness upon her she caught the sound of a familiar foot-step upon the side-walk, and, a moment later, upon the steps leading to the front door.

It was Gilbert at last. But to what purpose had he come? Poor Mary. This was the question that she asked herself, as she heard the door open and close, and heard its step in the hall. It was but a moment given to thought, however; for, in the next instant, Gilbert Graves stood before her looking at her intently from the threshold of the door.

The parlor was darkened somewhat, the curtains being drawn together; but there was light enough in the room to make all things plain within.

As Gilbert stood gazing at her with that intent look, she half crossed the room toward him with her hands outstretched to greet him.

"Oh, Gilbert, have you come at last!" she said. "I knew you would come, Gilbert, although everybody told me that you had forgotten me!"

As she finished speaking, she went

up to him and looked into his face with the old expression that was familiar, too, to Gilbert Graves; but a troubled look came upon him as he answered her:

"I thought it my duty to call upon you Mary," he said, irresolutely. "I dare say my visit is as painful to you as it is to me. Heavens! how you have changed!"

Then he looked away from her, and sat himself down, with the irresolute expression making itself more apparent in his face.

For a little while after he moved away from her, Mary stood with hands clasped over her bosom, gazing at the floor.

"It was only duty, then, that brought you to see me?" she murmured. "Oh, Gilbert, Gilbert! if you could only have known how patiently and hopefully I have been awaiting you! I have never felt until this moment how great has been my misfortune!"

"I had thought," he replied, that you would have understood both my silence and my absence from the house. When I heard of your—your misfortune, Mary, it occurred to me that perhaps you would think as I do—that it is better that we should cease to feel that interest in each other which we formerly felt. It was for that reason, and with the hope that you would forget me, that I remained away from you. I don't wish to appear cruel; but it seems to me that I ought to be honest."

"Then you have ceased to love me, Gilbert?"

She seated herself, but not as in the old time, by his side, and covered her poor, disfigured face with her hands. In that interval she wept silently. Finally she spoke to him:

"It was all true—all that they said, Gilbert, would you have cared much if I had died?"

He made no answer, and she went on:

"I wish to tell you, Gilbert, even in parting from you, how dearly I love you, and how much, during my sickness, I thought of you, and how cheerful it made me to think that you, above all others, were anxious about me, and hoping for my recovery. I knew that all my beauty—it was you who first made me think that perhaps I did possess beauty—had gone for ever; but even when I had this conviction, while recovering I felt a hope that your love would withstand even this test. But I forgive you Gilbert—I forgive you!"

"I should wish to hear you say, also, that you won't suffer from my change of feeling. But I have something else to tell you, Mary—something that is very important, and which if I do not tell of it now, you will know soon enough."

"Go on, Gilbert. But you need not speak it. You are going to be married?"

"Yes."

"Do you love the woman whom you are going to marry?—can you love her, Gilbert?"

"Of course I love her; that is, I suppose so. Forgive me, Mary, if what I say should be painful for you to listen to."

"And does she love you? are you sure?"

"To all appearances she does. You know her—Helen Varney."

When he spoke the name of his future wife, she walked to him and placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"When I shall have spoken what I have to say to you now, Gilbert," she said, "you and I will enter upon our parting. I warn you against this marriage. I know Helen Varney better than you can ever know her. If I had any revenge to satisfy, that revenge would be sufficiently ensured on that day that you should make Helen Varney your wife."

He looked up at her wonderingly. Her face—from which, truly, the beauty had vanished—was white with agony that was beginning to overcome her. Before he could speak to her, before he could ask an explanation of her strange words, she had thrown herself upon the sofa, and was weeping, with her face hidden from him.

These words, broken by the tearful sobs of Mary Plympton, were the last that were to come from her lips, and to which Gilbert Graves was to listen.

He went forth from her presence with a feeling of guilt which was never thereafter to depart from him, to seek the new love, while the faithful heart that had so longed for him was crushed and bleeding with its heavy burden of life long grief and disappointment.

From the home of the injured Mary, Gilbert bent his steps toward the presence of Helen Varney.

She was possibly awaiting him, for she sat at the parlor window, restlessly looking out into the street. A handsome woman, bold in look, and of a self-poise which expressed itself in her bearing, she received her lover as a sovereign would his vassal.

He stooped and kissed her. She accepted the kiss with a stoic indifference—so much so, indeed, that it might almost have seemed that Gilbert was mistaken in supposing that she loved him.

"Well?" she said, firmly, when he had seated himself by her side.

"I have seen Mary, and told her all," he replied. "It was cruel; but I had ceased to love her. I feel now, more strongly than ever, how much I love you, Helen."

"I am glad it is over. What did she say?"

"I left her in tears. She declares that she never will forget me."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Helen. "Was she weak enough to cry before you? I should like to see the man for whose love I would shed a single tear!"

Gilbert felt a chill as Helen spoke these words with a contumelious lip; but her nature had so conquered his that he did not dare to protest.

"Now that this last obstacle is removed, Helen," he said, "when shall we be married?"

"As soon as you like, Gilbert."

Before he rose to leave the day of their marriage was named; and when, in due course of time, that day came round, they were married with a hundred interested witnesses looking on. Some shrewd observers, indeed, were careful to note that the most uninterested person present seemed to be Mrs. Gilbert Graves, late Miss Varney.

As the months passed on, and as Gilbert Graves began to understand Helen's true nature, he reverted to his last conversation with Mary, and he often dwelt with bitterness upon the thought that he had rejected her devotion to ally himself to a woman whose actions convinced him that she did not love him. How noble, by contrast, did the character of Mary then appear!

Whatever might have been Helen's failures in the domestic circle, in society she was quite acceptable. The charm which she denied at home was lavishly bestowed when abroad. There her handsome face was lighted up with a bewitching smile, her laugh was the most attractive, and her manners the most winning. Indeed, it seemed a purpose with her to fascinate all with whom she should come in contact, and so reckless after awhile, did she become in this pursuit, that even her dear friends in society began to question her motives. The murmurs thus raised by the world did not, however, reach the ears of her husband. He had not then learned to doubt her sense of propriety, although he had long ago become assured of her indifference; but that which, in pity, was kept concealed from him, he was destined to know from herself.

One day—it was the first anniversary of their marriage—he went home from the haunts whereto his daily duties called him. Probably never, as on this day, since the time when his love for Helen was strongest, had he so loved her, so cherished her image, so yearned to be near her and to feel, if only for a little while, that a spark of her old interest in him remained. He had planned for her surprise. He had carefully selected for her a number of gifts, not of any great value, but which he thought would please her, and would, perhaps, revive some happy recollections in her mind.

This day, too, he had set apart as a day—sacred in the history of their lives—on which to speak to her more seriously than he had ever spoken before. Some lingering remnant of the feelings which, in his belief, had once actuated her toward him, would induce her to listen to him quietly, he thought. And from the conversation which he had proposed to himself he hoped that his wayward wife would rise with a better understanding of her duty to herself and to him.

The dusk was falling when he finally reached his home. So intent was he with his thoughts of Helen, that he had almost expected to see her waiting for him at the door. Trivial as it seemed the fact that she was not there obtruded itself, even at the threshold, like an obstacle to his happy train of thought. But it was only when he had entered the house that, for the first time since that morning, he began to experience something of the old pain which attached to his married life.

About the house was a silence which he had never noticed before. Connected with this silence was a gloom that

was not usual. He entered the parlor. She was not there. The gas was turned down, and the apartment seemed given over to solitude.

Thence he went up the stairway to his own room—his room and hers. But here was darkness, unrelieved by any light at all. He thought that, perhaps before the night had come on, she had laid down to sleep, and had not yet awakened. In this belief he called her name once or twice:

"Helen! Helen!"

No answer. Then for the first time a vague feeling of unrest possessed him. The familiar form was nowhere to be seen. But he saw with dreadful amazement, that the doors of the wardrobe wherein his wife's dresses were kept were open, and that the wardrobe itself was empty. From this testimony to a terrible conclusion, his gaze wandered about the room. He did not dare to let his mind rest upon the conclusion that was forcing itself upon his attention but everything that met his eye made this conclusion more peremptory and manifest. Helen had gone—on this, her marriage day, and fled from his roof and from his protection.

From his dishonored chamber the unhappy Gilbert Graves went down into the parlor. He sat there for a little while pondering. Around him were those memorials of her former presence—her portrait, the piano; her favorite chair—which nearly wrought madness to his brain. From that reverie he aroused himself to ring the bell for the attendance of the servant.

"Hannah," he said, when the latter made appearance, "did Mrs. Graves, before her departure to day, say whether she desired that you and the other servants should remain in her service until her return?"

He spoke with a wonderful calmness—so much so as to disconcert Hannah, who had had her suspicions aroused by Mrs. Graves's singular departure.

"She said nothing at all, sir. She seemed to be in a hurry to get away."

"Did—did her cousin call for her, Hannah, or did she go alone?"

"Was it her cousin sir? A gentleman came for her, and, when she had got her trunk ready, they went away together."

"Very well, Hannah. As Mrs. Graves will probably be away all the summer, I think I will break up house-keeping. Come down to my office to-morrow, and tell the others to come down, and you will all be settled with. Don't forget that, Hannah. I am very sorry that your mistress should have forgotten to give you her directions upon the subject. You may go now."

Left to solitude, he again gave himself up to thought. He had done what he deemed most advisable to remove suspicion from the minds of the household. Then he set to work to find any message that she might have left for him. He looked everywhere, but to no purpose. Leaving the parlor, he hence more sought his own room, the loneliness of which seemed more appalling than ever in the face of the certain knowledge that his wife had proven faithless. There, at last, his hand fell upon it—a letter addressed to him, in Helen's handwriting, but hurriedly and nervously written. This was her parting message:

"Perhaps I am adding another wrong to the great wrong that I am about to commit, when I leave these words for you to read. Did you think—oh, did you ever think when you married me, that I could ever desert you as I am about to do? Ever since our marriage I have been haunted by the thought of poor Mary Plympton. It has driven me to this. It was for the love of me that you broke her heart, Gilbert. Seek her again, and, if such happiness can be reserved for you, marry her for the sake of the wretched woman for whom you sacrificed a pure and loving woman's devotion. I am going away, never to see you again. Oh! if I could only have loved you as Mary did! But upon this anniversary of our marriage, commence to forget me. We have both sinned and suffered. Heaven forgive us both, Gilbert!"

HELEN.

In these lines, more fatal than the thrust of the murderer's steel, did Gilbert Graves read the story of retribution. And, as he read it, the vision of the face of the desolate woman whom he had once loved, and who could never be his, rose before him to his discomfiture. Truly he had been the architect of ruin!

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