

BASIL'S VINDICATION

HE pressed the fragrant note to his lips, and, with a serene smile, leaned back in his chair. It was more, much more, than he had ever dared to hope.

Only a few words, written in a dainty feminine hand on a sheet of tinted note paper, yet Basil Vere, having read, thought himself the happiest man alive.

"Meet me in St. Saviour's Church at noon to-morrow. MARIE."

The messenger who had brought the epistle having gone, Basil gave himself up to an hour's sweet contemplation of his love.

Marie Somerville was the only daughter of a wealthy, but proud, lawyer, who had made up his mind that no one in the three kingdoms was too good for Marie.

Marie, however, inheriting more of her mother's gracious sweetness of character than of her father's stern and harsh demeanor, thought otherwise, and would have none of the many suitors that the latter provided for her choice.

Then one day she met Basil Vere, a young subaltern in an infantry regiment, who from the very first time of meeting had determined to woo and win the pretty, blue-eyed daughter of the lawyer.

Opportunities for seeing each other were not frequent, however, and many were the subterfuges to which resort had to be made in order that they might enjoy each other's society.

But to-morrow! Then Basil would pour out his whole heart to his love, quite undisturbed.

It was almost too good to be true, and he threw his cap high in the air.

Half an hour before noon Basil sat patiently in a secluded seat, hidden behind one of the massive pillars of the church, waiting for Marie.

At every step he raised his head and watched those who entered.

Noon came, and the great clock overhead chimed out the hour.

"She will be here in a moment," he said to himself, hoping that the next worshipper would appear in the person of his love, but all in vain.

The suspense seemed long, and the quarter chimed; still the subaltern waited.

That she would come he had no doubt, but what had hindered her?

The half-hour struck. Almost before the echo had died away a voice sounded almost in his ear.

"Basil!"

Marie had entered a small door behind him, taking him unawares.

"I could not come before, Basil; I have been detained."

"My own Marie, pray do not excuse yourself. I am proud to wait."

"Hush, Basil! Remember, we may be heard here. My brother is coming."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. He said he would be back in half an hour. They suspect me of meeting you."

"Would they prevent our intercourse, Marie?"

"If they could," she answered. "But we must not let them. If we are careful and ever on the alert we shall not arouse suspicion."

"You do not regret your love?"

"How can you ask, Basil? That were impossible!" Marie answered with a solemn look. "Should I be here otherwise?"

"No, Marie, but I wished to hear it again from your sweet lips," he answered.

Just at that moment the clock struck one. With a start Marie arose.

"Look! Francis has seen us," she cried, as a young fellow rushed after them when they walked out of the church.

They quickened their pace, but were too late. Francis touched Marie on the shoulder.

"What does this mean, Marie?" he asked bluntly. "Who is this fellow?"

"Francis!"

Marie's eyes flashed upon her brother. Anger was plainly visible on her features, the graceful contour of her face becoming more visible in anger than when in repose. "How dare you speak of my friend like that?"

"Your friend, Marie! You must be mad! Surely, girl—"

He could hardly utter his thoughts. He gave a fierce scowl at Basil, who stood near. "Surely, girl, you don't call that your friend?"

The insult did not pass unnoticed by the subaltern. His hands itched to clutch Francis by the throat, but Marie's restraining influence held him back.

"Take no notice of him, Basil," returned Marie with hauteur, turning her back on her brother. "He is not responsible for his words."

"Oh, oh!" sneered Francis. "So that's your game, is it? I'll soon make the fellow cry 'Peccavi,' I'll warrant." Basil turned upon him.

"Basil, take no heed, there's a good fellow," whispered Marie to him; "he is my brother, remember."

The simple words were enough for the subaltern. With a sulky growl, he walked on beside Marie, wishing himself for once without his love.

But Francis was not to be balked in his designs. Stepping up to Basil, he caught him roughly by the shoulder.

"Here, take yourself off!" he cried.

Basil took no notice. This aroused the demon in his aggressor.

He raised his fist. "Will you clear off?" he cried madly.

Marie interposed her body between the two men, clinging tightly to her brother. With a cry of rage he flung her ruthlessly from him and struck out at Basil.

At that moment Basil stooped slightly to catch Marie and received the blow on his temple.

He staggered back. All his wildest passions aroused at this mad attack, he doubled his fists and stood on his guard.

Marie had by this time recovered herself and saw what Basil intended.

Clasping her hands, she stood before him. "Remember," she whispered, "he is my brother."

"Go now, Basil," she whispered.

He needed no second bidding. He dared not stay in the company of Francis longer, else he knew that he must retaliate upon him his ill words and blows.

Oh, that Marie had not asked him to do the all but impossible.

And as Basil Vere walked homeward his brow was clouded and his step heavy.

Not a week had passed. Basil Vere sat musing in his boat on the Thames below Oxford. He had been boating alone, and had drawn his boat in among the rushes by the river bank.

Thus, quite out of sight, he could watch the other parties that passed and repassed.

Suddenly he heard voices.

"The despicable cad!" said one.

"Yes; the fellow actually had the cool cheek to meet Marie in St. Saviour's Church," said a voice that Basil recognised as belonging to Francis Somerville.

"Great Scot!"

"Luckily I came upon them in time or I did not know what might not have happened."

"But what does Marie say about it?" asked one.

"Cut up quite nasty. Will not have a word to say to me now! Says I've killed her with my interference, and nopes all day long."

"She's a fine girl, Francis."

"And the old boy means to have her marry well," Francis answered. "Nothing less than a title will suit him. Besides—"

"So Vere is altogether too low?"

"The cad!" muttered Francis again.

"I'd like to meet the fellow now. 'Pon my soul, I would almost drown the insolent puppy!" he cried.

But Basil heard no more. The boat had passed out of hearing.

An hour later Basil was run into by two men in a boat.

His boat was upset and he was precipitated into the water.

Being a good swimmer, he came to the surface in a very short time, and found Francis in the other boat taunting him.

"Save yourself, you coward!" he shouted with a leer. "Hands off our boat. We'll have none such as you among us!"

But he was too late. Basil managed to get one knee on the side of the boat. Francis got out of his seat to prevent him from securing a hold, and overbalanced himself.

Next moment all three were struggling in the water.

It did not take long for Basil to swim to the bank. The second occupant of the boat was soon by his side in a half-drowned condition, vowing vengeance on Basil. But where was Francis?

They could not see him for the moment.

A minute had not passed, however, before his head appeared above the water. He threw his hands up with a supplicating gesture and then disappeared.

"Good heavens, the weir!" cried Basil. "Nothing can save him once he gets caught in that current!"

With one glance at his helpless companion, Basil threw off his jacket and swam for the place where he had last seen Francis.

He lay on a couch and rubbed his eyes. It was several hours later.

He heard the voice of Francis in the next room.

"Is it really you, Marie?"

"My dear Basil, how can I thank you enough? Why, you almost died for Francis!"

A glad smile lit up Basil's features. "I did it because he is your brother!" he answered simply.

Marie smothered his face with kisses.

"I will make it all right with the old man, Basil!" whispered Francis next day, as he reclined on a couch at the inn. "You need have no fear now. I was a mean, despicable hound—"

"Hush!" cried Basil. "You've made me happy, so why should I grumble?"

"A mean, despicable—"

"Look here, Francis, if you don't leave off talking such rubbish you and I will quarrel."

"We mustn't do that, Basil, must we?"

"Of course not!" cried Marie, entering at that moment.

"Can you forgive me, Marie?" asked Francis.

"Ten thousand times!" answered Marie happily.

And she meant it, too.—New York News.

IN THE CATTLE COUNTRY.

Ranges Once Rich Are Now Completely Deserted.

For ten years, more or less, say from 1874 to 1884, and later than this in the northern range, there was universal prosperity and lots of money; to be a cow-man meant being a small but powerful king with a princely kingdom, the boundaries of which were set by precedent and by the honor of custom—as far as a man on horseback could see, and by water—as firmly as if corner-marked and title-deeded.

There was no rent and virtually no taxes to pay. A man might own a hundred thousand cattle and not an acre of land, though he claimed "range rights" to fifty thousand acres, and enforced those rights with blood and iron, says a writer in the Century Magazine.

Apparently this was a new sort of free life in which man had risen above the old slow rules of thrift. It was a simple business; turn the cattle to grass, and when money was needed, round them up and sell them.

But the lucky dog sometimes has difficulty in enjoying his bone in peace. Lured by the stories of sudden riches in the cattle country, other men, as bold and hardy as the first, flocked in from all parts of the world, and began raising big and little herds. The building of the railroads across the continent stimulated immigration; the great Texas boom followed the completion of the Texas Pacific railroad in 1883.

At first the early comers welcomed the new rangers, sold their cattle at exorbitant prices, chuckled at their innocence, allowed them to come in on the ranges, and grew richer and richer. There were times when Texas steers, big and little, brought \$25 each on the range. But the tide swelled, and the cattle continued to increase enormously. Presently the first real settlers, the "nesters" of Texas, who wished to fence the land for farms, appeared in numbers, and the early comers, the original cow-boys, began to chafe.

"Who's elbowing me?" they inquired, and there was prompt and effective shooting and the wholesale cutting of the new fences.

Many good men lay down in the hot sand, never to rise again. But that, bad as it was, did not tell the whole story of destruction. If cattle had been killed instead of men, the trouble might have been averted, but the herds went on multiplying until they covered all the range, giving it no rest winter or summer. Each cow-man scrambled for all he could get; he argued that if he did not take the grass his neighbor would. And who cared a rap for the future! Life was short and money tangible. At first there had been enough grass to support one steer to every two acres of land; in half a dozen years a steer did well to make his living on five acres. After that the ratio steadily widened. So great was the struggle for new territory that whole herds of cattle sometimes went twenty miles or more to water and then back again, galloping every step, and working hard between times to get enough from the falling ranges to keep life within their lean carcasses. And to-day there are many parts of the range that will not support ten cattle to the square mile, one steer to every sixty-four acres, and it is a good range indeed that will feed a steer to every twenty acres. There are whole ranges in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, once rich beyond belief, that are completely deserted and given over to the desert.

Distrustful Father.

"Herbert has a lovely disposition," said Ethel.

"Yes," answered Ethel's father, "Herbert's disposition is too lovely. I should not like to trust your future to his hands. He is the sort of person who will be imposed on without resenting it. I have known him to go to a ball game and not want to fight the umpire when he gave an unjust decision against the home team."—Washington Star.

Coal in Poland.

New coal fields, which have been opened up in Poland, may, it is stated, lead to Warsaw developing into one of the foremost manufacturing cities in Europe.

Value of Canada's Minerals.

The total value of Canada's mineral product in 1900 reached over \$63,000,000, or \$12 a head of the population.

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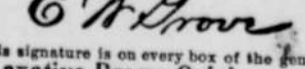
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