

THE PATH OF HONOR,
OR
ABOVE THE THORNS THE ROSE.

BY MARY FREDERICK.

CHAPTER I.

A HAPPY HOME IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.
From New York Weekly.

"You are a lucky fellow!"
"Yes, think so?" replied Bradford Morse to the exclamation of his friend, Chester Teale. "Well, I knew this old estate could be fertilized, and I thought it at a low price. Whoa, Fan," and he drew up his pretty mare on a knoll and stopped to point out the improvements he had made.

"This is your home, Brad? Ah, this, since we got through college!" said Teale, with a sigh.

"And you old fellow, have never married yet?"

"No. I've spent my time wandering around over Europe and the rest of the world."

"Well, your father left you a fortune."

"Yes," was Teale's sharp and almost irritable answer. "And while you have been making one of your own—I have been losing mine."

"You don't tell me you've lost your money?"

And it was plain to be seen that in the estimate of the shrewd Yankee, Bradford Morse, this was a serious defect. He seemed almost to regret having invited his friend home to dine.

"I know what you think of that confession," was Teale's frank and winking rejoinder. "But it is true. I am poor! Fact is, I ought to have married some thrifty girl who could have made me a home and happiness. She would have saved my money. I am not a selfish man. Indeed, I lost my money largely by trying to help my friends to be happy."

"I am fortunately married," replied Morse, with a laugh to palliate what he was about to say.

"But I take more delight in driving business than anything else in this world."

Then he fell to describing his patent, in manufacturing which he had accumulated such rapid wealth.

"I do not agree with you, old friend. Home should be first."

"Well, isn't that a magnificent home? And my wife—by the way, you knew Grace?"

A shadow of pain passed over Chester Teale's handsome features, though his friend did not look to notice it. Teal quickly responded in self-possessed tones:

"Oh, yes, I knew Gracie Haskins well, at the old academy. She and I were playmates; indeed, in childhood, I used to think, and after traveling the wide world over I still think she was the most beautiful girl I ever saw."

He strove hard to keep his rich, strong tones firm, and succeeded well enough, for this money-maker, Bradford Morse, was never yet jealous of his lovely wife nor had he occasion to be.

"Gracie is a fine woman, finer than ever, if I do say it," was the reply. "I can afford her everything. And she becomes it all, from her carriage and bays, to her drawing-rooms. She'll be surprised to see you."

Chester Teale would have given anything in the world that he possessed to have been back again in the city. He called himself over and over again a fool to have accepted the invitation of his old college mate to go out and drive; for Teale was not, to tell the truth, so very intimately acquainted with Morse in his old Yale days. He had to confess to himself that it was more, a thousand times more, for the sake of catching one more glimpse of Grace Haskins' face that he went.

"But of course," he said to himself, as they turned in at the gate-way, and swept up the long drive, "of course I am strong. I am at least an honorable man. At all events, Chester Teale is not the man to help any disappointed wife to escape her chosen lot."

As the buggy spun with a whirl to the house front, Morse shouted, in a dry, business accent:

"Hullo, Grace!"

Mrs. Morse stood on the veranda, between the fluted columns, over which the ivy twined, a picture of wifely welcome that ought to have warmed the heart of the coldest money-grubber whom the world

It was a bright summer evening, with the oppressive heat tempered by the cool zephyrs that fluttered her soft muslin dress about her light figure of graceful outlines. Rippling bands of auburn hair were drawn just above the shells of ears and gathered in a knot behind. Two red roses were thrust in just below the white throat. Her baby was proudly held by the nurse at her side. If ever on earth a radiant picture of heaven below was to be found it was to be found here, awaiting this man, as she said:

"My dear, you are just ten minutes late," and she threw him a kiss before he could put his feet out from the vehicle.

"Brought up a friend to dine with us. Old friend of yours, too."

But it was an unapprehensive introduction as if by no possibility great fates were dependent upon that moment.

"I shall hardly venture to dispense with his mentioning my name," said Teale, mounting the steps behind his host to take the lady's hand.

"What! Chester Teale?"

"The same old six pence, Mrs. Morse."

"Why don't you call her Grace?"

was Mr. Morse's careless remark, as he strode on to the veranda's edge to give an order to the gardener.

Had the man seen the rich blood surge into his wife's face as she took the new-comer's hand, he would not have said that.

Had Morse seen the marble pallor that left Chester Teale's broad brow bloodless and his cheek ashen, where it showed against his glossy black beard, he would not have said that.

But Mrs. Morse simply said:

"Welcome to Ashmead Mr. Teale."

Then she turned to call to her husband.

"Bradford, you have not kissed the baby. Do you pass him by like that?"

"Oh, yes," replied the husband, yet going on to talk with the gardener.

"I did promise, Grace, to do better by the baby, especially when I brought company home."

Then he came back a kissed the baby's hand.

"But he has not kissed this charming woman yet," thought Teale; and it made him indignant to notice the omission.

Oh, what would not he have given, homelike, homelike, penniless wanderer, for a kiss from those rich lips, and a clinging embrace from those round, white arms.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Morse, to remember me so well" was what he said, however; and it was spoken in the most distant and formal way, yet with all the delicate courtesy of a traveled gentleman, which he could not lay off even if he would.

"Come in, Teale," was the interrupting remark of Mr. Morse, as he broke away and led forward into the elegant hall. "You'll want to wash and brush, and then dinner. I'm hungry as a bear. Tom, show this gentleman to his room. After dinner, Teale, I have already a business plan to propose that will retrieve your fallen fortunes."

Mrs. Morse had followed her bustling husband and his guest into the house, covering her retreat and folding out of sight the order of her loyal affection as well as she could. She simply remarked, sweetly:

"We shall be ready when you are ready, Mr. Teale. We got in the habit of having dinner for this hungry man." Then she added a pretty laugh.

Teale went to his room. The splendor of the renovated mansion was all lost on him. He was thinking. "What a shame! Why, the man is so wrapped up in business that I think he hardly loves her. Was that blush for me? God forbid that I, an honorable man, should so much as think it," and he stamped his foot upon the Axminster. "No, she blushed because, in the sight of an old flame, her husband passed her and the baby without even a kiss. Of course that was it—of course, of course."

As the guest went on with his hasty toilet he was forced by his own true conscience to step again, hair brush in hand, and assert to the empty air and the beautiful sunset that fell in at the open window.

"No! I do not want a kiss from those lips. I do not want the welcome of those white hands. They belong to another man. I will leave here. I will take the late train back into Boston. I must get to New York by the early morning train. New York! What is there? What is anywhere for me but a chance to use my education somehow for the honest grind that will bring bread? But to go from here is a clean man's duty. Business, with him? God forbid! I would starve first."

(To be Continued.)

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