

LOST AT THE BRIDAL HOUR.

From New York Weekly: CHAPTER III.

"STILL WARM WITH HIS LIFE'S BLOOD"

"Well," she continued, having been reassured of her lovers undying affection for her, whatever unpleasant events her recital might bring forth, "the old gipsy was standing at the end of the long walk, where she could command a full view of the house, and so of course saw me, and advanced to meet, and taking my hand led me into the rose arbor, and drew me to a seat, which placed me in a position with my back to the entrance, herself being seated so as to command a full view of the park gate, which I had managed to leave unlocked, and by which she had entered. She had soon entirely absorbed my attention, and I may say fairly enchanted me, by the marvelous and brilliant future she was making out for us—you and I, Armandus," faintly whispered the poor creature, raising her large, sad eyes, which were filled with tears, to her lover's face, as though she half doubted that he could love her still.

But when he answered that silent appeal by pressing her still closer to his heart, and imprinting love-born kisses upon her cold, white lips, and bade her proceed, she no longer doubted, and returned to her narrative with new hopes and fresh courage.

"Well," she resumed, "she had managed to entirely absorb my attention when suddenly some person or persons from behind me threw a blanket of some heavy wrappings over my head, which so completely stunned as well as smothered me, that I was unable to give any alarm. I was caught up, and felt myself hastily torn some distance in the arms of two persons, when I was placed in a carriage and driven hastily away. I then for the first time realized my situation, for I overheard a voice which I recognized—the voice of Richard Randall, and I swooned—"

"Great Heaven! the voice of Richard Randall!" repeated the poet.

And for just one moment his arm relaxed its firm hold on the form he was pressing to his heart.

"Yes, dearest, the voice of Richard Randall!" she reiterated. "But dearest, listen," she whispered.

And she raised her head from the shoulder of her lover, and gazed with such a peculiar and startling expression in her eyes that her companion released his hold, and springing to his feet, gazed searchingly into the depths of the large and now sparkling eyes before him.

For just one brief moment the poor creature returned the gaze, with a soft light stealing into her sparkling eyes, and a gentle smile playing upon her pale face.

Then like a flash of lightning the scene changed, and the soft loving light died from out those handsome, dark eyes, but to give place to a terrible and unnatural brilliant, and springing to her feet she confronted her lover, who stood like one petrified.

"See! see!" she cried, drawing from the bosom of her dress a small, silver-mounted poniard, and holding it up to her companion's gaze. "See, Armandus, it is still warm with his life's blood! I thrust it

through his foul heart, and then fled—ran to you Armandus."

The poor creature had scarcely ceased speaking when a ghastly pallor usurped the momentary flush which had been born of excitement of the moment, and fell in a dead swoon against her faithful lovers breast; for the poet of Brainbridge now knew that his long-loved and long-lost Marcella was a maniac!

"Yes, yes! Great Heaven! she is mad!" whispered the poet, as he tenderly raised the inanimate form in his arms and placed it upon the lounge, and pouring a glass of wine from a decanter standing on the table at his right hand, he pried open the set teeth, and putting a spoonful between her lips soon had the satisfaction of seeing her eyes slowly open and raised to his face.

A beam of sanity again looked out from these dark eyes, and the soft light stole over the countenance, while a sweet but terrible sad smile played again over the once beautiful face of the unhappy creature.

"Armandus," she whispered, as she opened her eyes.

"Yes, darling," he replied; "try and sleep," he said, laying his hand caressingly upon her throbbing brow.

He now, for the first time since it had dropped from her hand, thought of the poniard, and so quickly stepping to the place where it had dropped, picked it up and held it before the lamp, and surely it was stained—yes, dyed deeply with gore.

The last half hour had been like a century to Armandus Clarendon, so crowded had been his brain with serious questionings.

That Marcella Marsden was insane he knew to be a fact. But what position ought he to take? Surely he could never relinquish her to the care of a mad-house. And her parents had both died from grief within a year after her mysterious disappearance, and she being their only heir, her father on his death-bed, had sent for the poet of Brainbridge, and placed his fortune in his hands, in trust for his daughter, should she be found within twenty-five years. After that time, however, the poet, was to make use of it as his own.

Had she only retained her reason, Clarendon loved her well enough to have smothered every feeling of repugnance, toward her betrayer, and would have married her. But could he, dare he marry a maniac? He knew that Richard Randall had been a suitor for Miss Marsden's hand, and that she had previous to having met him been betrothed to Randall, whom she discarded for him; and he now fully believed all Marcella had said, both during her sane moments after she had entered his library, which preceded the ravings, when she confessed to the murdering of Randall, and all that she avowed had taken place even as she said.

Clarendon had not a female friend in the world, but he determined at once to find a responsible woman to take charge of his demented darling, and so through the long hours of that desolate night the poet sat in his easy-chair which he drawn up beside the lounge where the poor creature was sleeping calmly, for her physical strength was nearly exhausted, and arranged his plans.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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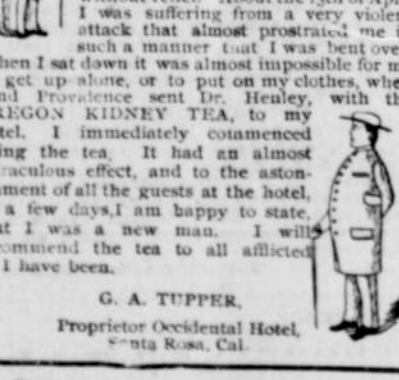
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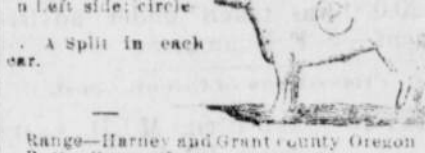
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