

The Dispatch

TELL BOTH SIDES, AND TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES.

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I WONDER.

HELEN A. MANVILLE.

I wonder when the day will be, When Death shall come to tell to me The Story that all must hear;

I wonder if it will be spring, When o'er my head the birds will sing Their first sweet song not set to words;

I wonder if I shall be glad— To leave the pain I long have had? Or, if friends who love me so,

THE CASKET'S KEY.

BY L. CY H. HOOPER.

When Chester Seabrook, a young wealthy, intelligent, and ambitious of literary fame, went to Italy to collect materials and to consult authorities before beginning his projected tragedy of "Caesar Borgia," his friends and relatives in New York were far from anticipating the actual results of his researches.

When Louis was a little over twelve years of age his father died suddenly of typhoid pneumonia. He had one only sister, Mrs. Richard Marsden, and to her and her husband he bequeathed the guardianship of his son and that son's large fortune.

upon him. He was never strong, and his disposition was gloomy and morbid to a degree that was extraordinary in one that was so great a favorite of fortune.

These proposals were negated at once, and decidedly, by Mr. Marsden. "You are both of you too young to think of such a thing as marriage, or even of an engagement, Louis," his uncle made answer.

"You do not know to what you do me, uncle," was the gloomy response of the young man. "Grace is all that I have to live for upon earth, and if I lose her—"

"And then you will give Grace to me," eagerly asked the youth, his pale face flushing and his dark eyes glowing as he spoke.

"I make no promise; I will enter into no compact with you on that subject. You and Grace must both be entirely free, and if either of you should fall in love with some one else—"

"I cannot admit the existence of such a possibility as far as I am concerned," Louis made answer, passionately.

"Nevertheless such things are possible, and have often occurred, especially where two such children as you both are were concerned. Now let me hear nothing more on this subject. I shall send Grace to stay with her aunt, Mrs. Blayn, in Washington, until you are gone, and I feel seriously displeased with you if you broach to her any subject connected with love and matrimony before her departure.

And so well and carefully did Mrs. Marsden (who was at once acquainted by her husband with all the details of the affair) watch over her daughter, that Grace went away for her visit wholly unconscious of the conquest she had made of her cousin's affections. She was, to tell the truth, so delighted at the idea of a journey to Washington, of a sojourn with her favorite aunt (whose daughter Alice was about her own age) and of all the things she meant to see and do, that she lost sight of the fact that Cousin Louis was going to sail for Europe in a few weeks, and that she would not see him again for a long time.

relief in the thought of his absence. "You must not forget me, Grace," he said, fervently, at the moment of her departure. And the young girl answered, gayly: "No fear of that, Louis. Even if you never write to any of us, I shall always remember you. For you are my cousin, you know—just the same to me as one of my brothers."

Louis was about to utter some protestation respecting this announcement on Grace's part; but a significant touch on his shoulder from the hand of Mr. Marsden recalled that gentleman's stern prohibitions, and he contented himself with kissing with fervor the little hand that Grace frankly placed within his own, unheeding the fresh young face that was held up to him for a parting salute.

"How odd you are, Louis, not to kiss me good-by!" she cried, gayly, as she sprang into the carriage; "remember, you must write your first letter from Rome to me. And be sure you tell me what you think about St. Peter's and the Colosseum. I wish I were going with you to see them all."

"If you only were!" muttered Louis, as the carriage drove away. "There goes my guardian angel, and I must go forth alone to meet the demon."

A few weeks later Louis Seabrook sailed from New York for Europe. He did not fail to write to Grace more than one impassionate love-letter shortly after his arrival, but the child, perplexed, unsympathizing, and half provoked with what she called "Cousin Louis's foolishness," made no response to his fervent protestations. Louis took the hint, and the correspondence thereafter was conducted on a more tranquil footing.

To this change a sharp reproof from Mr. Marsden, and a treat of forbidding altogether any interchange of letters, probably contributed largely. The traveler wrote but seldom, but he often sent tokens of regard and remembrance to his uncle's family, and especially to Grace. One of these was a fine copy of the celebrated portrait of Caesar Borgia, by Raphael, which is one of the noted treasures of the Borgnese Palace.

"So it is thus that I find you, woman that I loved," he said between his teeth, "on the eve of your marriage, all radiant and smiling in your bridal finery!" "Cousin—Cousin Louis!" stammered the young girl, amazed and half-alarmed at Seabrook's demeanor. "Oh, you need not be afraid—I have not come to overwhelm you with reproaches or tell you all the ill that you have wrought, my Cousin Grace. I have brought you a present from beyond the seas. Take it, and with it such blessings from me as you and your kinsfolk richly deserve."

So saying, he turned toward the table, and brought forward to the light an ivory casket that stood there, still half secluded in its wrappings. Diverged of these, it showed in the sunset light as a marvel of artistic beauty. In high relief upon the lid was carved the meeting of Bacchus and Ariadne, and the sides were adorned with a representation of the bridal procession of the god, wherein bachelants and satyrs, nymphs and fauns, and cupids and panthers, were all mingled in graceful confusion. The mountings of the casket were in antique silver, and on a shield just above the lock were engraved the in-

herited heirlooms on his great grandson and sole direct descendant.

The two years that had been fixed as the period of young Seabrook's absence had nearly come to an end, and he had already written to announce the date at which he would sail for home, when he received from Mrs. Marsden the news of Grace's engagement to a young talented lawyer, Stuart Hasting by name. The match was one that was satisfactory in every way to Mr. and Mrs. Marsden, and to do them justice, they had both looked upon the attachment of Louis for his cousin as a mere boyish passion that had not survived the tests of time and absence.

But it was not ill the day before that fixed for the ceremony that Louis made his appearance at the house of his aunt. He received a warm welcome from Mrs. Marsden, who had always looked upon him as one of her own children.

"You have grown tall and manly, Louis," she said, after the first greetings were at an end, "but you look wild, haggard and feverish. Are you suffering from malaria? You must not fall ill on the very day of your return—the eve of Grace's wedding day. Your playmate of bygone days would feel sorely grieved if you were not to be present to-morrow."

"Ah, yes—where is Grace?—I had forgotten Grace!" the young man responded, hurriedly. "I want to see her—I have my wedding gift ready for her, and I want to present it to her myself."

"Go into the library, then, and I will send her to you in a moment. She is just having her wedding dress tried on for the last time, and I will tell her not to take it off, for I want you to see how charmingly she looks in it."

And with a nod and a smile, Mrs. Marsden disappeared.

Some ten minutes later the door of the library where Louis was pacing the floor impatiently, was slowly opened, and the bride elect, graceful and charming in her vesture of snow satin, with a mien of grave sweet maidenliness, advanced with outstretched hands to meet the newly returned wanderer. He gazed upon her for a moment with a lowering brow and a bitter smile.

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tertwined initials "C. B." and below them a "V." surmounted with a ducal coronet, the insignia of "Caesar Borgia, Duke of Valentinois." It was a gift worthy to be offered by an ennobled monarch to his future Queen.

Grace drew near and gazed with breathless delight at the exquisite workmanship of the ivory carvings. Meantime Louis took from his pocket-book an antique key, in darkened silver. This, too, was a veritable work of art. The tube was held in the upraised hands of a mermaid, whose curved fish tail formed the handle of the key. This handle on its outer edge was bordered with small, scarcely perceptible points, or spines, which would be apt to wound the hand of any one trying to open the lock and not warned to take due precautions. This key Louis carefully fitted into the lock of the casket.

"Open it—open it, Grace!" he cried with feverish eagerness. "Within you will find inclosed a necklace of the choicest pearls to be found in all Paris. Open it—open it, and tell me what you think of your wedding presents."

But without touching the key the girl glided forward, and, resting her clasped hands on the lid of the casket looked into the dark, troubled depths of her cousin's eyes with a tender seriousness in her glance that caused him to turn pale and look aside.

"Dear Cousin Louis," she said, "you have brought me a magnificent gift, but do not think me exacting or ungrateful if I ask you for something more. You know I am going out to-morrow to a new life, and I want to take with me all the kindly thoughts and affection of those who loved me when I was a little child. You feel bitterly towards us all, I know, because I could not love you better than I have done—just as I have loved my brothers. It will cast a shadow on the brightness of my wedding day if I think you are still displeased with my parents, and still feel unkindly towards me. Dear Cousin Louis—my brother Louis—in memory of our old pleasant days together, will you not grant me my request? Take back your lovely casket and your necklace of pearls, and give me instead your frank brotherly affection once more."

He fixed his dark, burning eyes on the soft-blue ones raised so pleadingly to his own.

"So you will not open the casket, Grace?" he said, hoarsely.

"Not till you promise to grant me my request. Ah, Louis, have you forgotten all those days when we were children together, and little Cousin Grace used to pet you, and watch over you, and keep her boisterous brothers from teasing you? You were always very dear to me, Louis—be my dear brother once again and always."

Still gazing fixedly upon her, he drew the casket towards him, unlocked it threw back the lid, and withdrew the key. He held up his hand with its open palm turned toward Grace as he did so, and the astonished girl could see upon it one or two minute drops of blood caused by the punctures of the points on the handle of the key.

"Take your casket and your pearls, Grace, and with them my full forgiveness. You do not know what good service I have done you to-day. I have swept from your path a bitter and dangerous foe. Did you ever read Victor Hugo's 'Esmeralda'? There are four lines in an old translation of that poem which are now ringing in my brain:

"Mine be the tomb and thine be light and life, I die, and Fate avenges thee. 'Tis well, I go, Oh angel of my life, to learn If Heaven is sweet as were thy love. Farewell."

So saying, he took Grace's hand

in both his hands, kissed her tenderly on the forehead, and departed.

A week later the community was electrified by the news of the sudden death of young Louis Seabrook, who succumbed to a rapid and mysterious malady a few days after the marriage of Miss Marsden. The disease which proved so speedily fatal baffled all the science and conjectures of the physicians called in to attend him. They agreed that his symptoms closely resembled those produced by the bite of a serpent, and finally decides that the patient had fallen a victim to some acute and mysterious form of blood-poisoning.

It was only Richard Marsden who learned the truth, and that was after the death of Louis Seabrook. Amongst the papers of the deceased was found a letter addressed to his uncle. It set forth in rambling, incoherent fashion these facts: "I brought the casket of Caesar Borgia as a present to Grace," he wrote, intending that she should not long survive her marriage. The little points that stud the handle of the silver key, and that are arranged so as to puncture the hand of any one who tries, unwarned, to open the casket, contain a deadly venom. But once brought face to face with my fair and gentle cousin, I could not find it in my heart to carry out my purpose. Two natures have striven for supremacy in my soul. The one is the cruel serpent-cunning infused there by the Borgia blood of my maternal ancestors. The other is the frank kindness of my American father. What if the first named element should once again win the upper hand, as it did when I planned Grace's bridal gift? I have deliberately tested on myself the death-dealing properties of the poisoned key. I have destroyed it. Never again will it work harm on any human being. Ind never again shall I. I would not live to deal with fresh temptations—perhaps to succumb to them. The legacy of my great-grandfather has wrought evil for no one—not even for myself. I go.

"To where, beyond these voices there is peace."

—Frank Leslie's.

FUN.

A kidnapper—paregoric. A stable government should be one that ruled by horse sense. "I think I'll give this country the shake," remarked the malaria, as it prepared for business. Cardinal Newman says: "A gentleman is one who never inflicts pain." That settles it, then! The watermelon is no gentleman. Miss Blinks—"Why do you marry Tom Bloodgood? He is well off in years." Miss Jinks—"Yes, but he is also well off in money." "What is more lovely than a peaceful grandmother?" asks an exchange. Her granddaughter. If this is not the right answer, we give it up. Husband (attempting to sing)—"My voice is rather husky to-night." Wife—"No wonder it's husky. You are full of corn." "What do you sell that ribbon for?" asked a young lady in a dry-goods store. "Eight dollars a week—hh, beg pardon—50 cents a yard, Miss. A New York brewer is said to give away to his workmen forty kegs of beer a day. He must be busy. At least this looks like an evidence that he has his hands "full." When Dr. H. and Lawyer S. were walking arm in arm, a wag said to a friend: "These two just equal to one highwayman." "Why," asked his friend, "because," rejoined the wag, "it is a lawyer and doctor—your money or your life."