

Written for THE ENTERPRISE]

"THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW."

BY MARTHA CONNELLY.

He had known her always. From the nursery she had been princess; he, prince, and May prime minister. In childhood she had been playmate and May, chum.

How well he remembered the trips to and from school. He walking by her side, gladly bearing double burden of school bags and lunches, she chatting gaily and laughing up into his bright, eager face, while May marched along independently in front, occasionally giving them a backward glance of approbation.

During his college days she had been his chief thought, his inspiration to win the fame which came to him.

What wonder, then, that on the day he was made junior member of the firm of Haywood & Son, he sought to claim her for his very own.

While he felt unworthy to even tie her dainty little shoes, he had cherished her so long that his love for her had grown to be a part of his very being. Without her life would be unutterable woe, a blank existence! Surely she might be willing to try and love him if only in return for an atom of his.

He sought her among the violets and, exerting his powerful strength to control the impetuous, passionate utterances which sprang to his lips, told her gently, what she had known all the time, and begged her earnestly to give him the right to shield her from every possible ill wind.

Her answer was characteristically sweet and simple—putting her hands upon his shoulders, she looked up into the eager eyes, "Do I love you?" she said. "It is useless to try and express how much, you are my very existence. I have always been your princess, and was only waiting for you to claim me."

How he longed to clasp her in his arm and press throbbing kisses on eyes, cheeks and lips! But he dared not; it might frighten her. She was too dainty and sweet for rough treatment; that belonged to women like May, who was dark, strong and robust. Instead, he drew her slight figure gently to him and kissing her tenderly—"My darling," he said, "God is too good to me. What have I done to deserve such happiness?"

* * *

She had been such a sweet June bride. He knew he was the happiest man on earth. He wondered why everybody hadn't wanted her. Was it possible that she was his forever? Truly his life was a path of roses!

But now she lay dying. Oh, God, the agony of it!

It could not be that he was sitting by her smiling when even the bright, crisp air seemed crushing out his very soul, and he longed to lie down and breathe out his strong young life for her.

But he had promised the Doctor to be calm so that the end might be Peace, and he would, though it cost his heart's blood.

Leaning over, he gently pinched her ear, as was his wont, saying, "Come, Princess, let's enter our rose-leaf chariot for a ride in the enchanted forest."

The old, eager childish look came back. "Oh do let's," she said, "Maybe we can find the flower of eternal youth." Then her mood changing, she leaned wearily upon his shoulder, "Sing to me, Prince. You and May haven't sang for me in so long."

Surely it was God's grace that gave him strength to sing every note clearly, and how surprised he was to hear May's sweet voice without a trace of tears.

As the last note died away both little arms stole round his neck, and the sweet, full lips were pressed to his. Then with a fond look at May she said: "You have never sung it sweeter. Whenever I hear that song I shall think of you two."

Then as the breath grew shorter—"You—have—both—been—so—good—to—me," whispering: "Prince—I—love—you," she raised both hands and was gone!

Gathering the frail little body in his arms, he begged her to come back to him, implored her to speak to him once more. Life was too sweet for her to die! He was desolate without her. Why didn't God let him go with her to love and protect her as he had always done? He felt like mounting the housetops and shrieking, "She is dead, dead, dead! Merciful God!" But he felt a firm hand on his shoulder and there stood May with the bridal robe to adorn the bride of Death, who, only a few short months before had been his bride.

How well he remembered her after May had decked her in it for him.

May pushed him gently from the room. "Go into her sitting-room and arrange everything there; no hand but yours shall touch it."

How deep the silence! It seemed that grief was expressed in everything he saw. Even the clock ticked mournfully. Princess—Princess—gone—gone.

Here was her low chair, there her guitar; he walked over to her writing desk. There were his letters tied with blue ribbon; in this corner invitations, in that German favors and souvenirs. Ah! here was her own precious hand-writing, and to him! He read as though it came from another world:—"My Own Precious Husband:—It may be that you will never receive this, as I only expect to leave it for you when I am dead, and not having any idea of dying soon, it may lie here for years, or perhaps, be destroyed. But while I am so well and bright I want to tell you as best I can how happy you have made me, and how sweet life has been to me for having known and loved you always. I have never understood why you have loved me so truly all our lives. Our natures are so different: it is like the gay, dancing brook and the mighty, rushing river. While I love you with my whole soul, it is far from what you need and deserve. A nature like May's would be the answering mate to yours, and I want to ask you if I die and she be still unclaimed, that you will try and win her; wake into tune the heart-strings that would chord so well with yours. You can be so happy with her, and I would love to think of you two who are dearest on earth to me, going through life hand in hand, thinking often of me as a link which binds you more closely together.

"Does it seem strange for your gay little butterfly to write in this fashion? These are my 'secret thoughts,' which might cast a tiny shadow over our realm of bliss, which neither of us would enjoy. Try and think as I do about it, and life will be much sweeter to you than it has ever been.

"Your own,
"PRINCESS."

* * *

Three years later he returned from a foreign country, a little gray, perhaps, but in the prime of manhood.

Quietly he slipped out to the violet bed, only to see May seated in the same low chair, the familiar work basket by her side.

Her face was turned from him, but he could see that she was reading a letter, which, as she saw him approaching, was quickly hidden. As she looked up he saw traces of tears in her eyes, and on her cheeks.

Could it be that she loved some contemptible wretch who was cruel to her? Just let him catch him; that was all!

Throwing himself down on the violets he began, vehemently, "May, I know you will hate me, and may be I am too late, but I'm going to tell you anyway. God knows I couldn't help it if I would. I love you, child, with a love that I never dreamed that I could possess for a human being. How I have fought against it, and

tried to put it away from me! But I am completely mastered. It frightens me to think of it. I could attain to the highest or sink to the lowest for you. Oh! I can't begin to express it, and it is useless to try, but what I want above everything on earth is you. It seems as if my brain throbs, my pulses beat 'May, May; wife, wife.' Oh! my darling, won't you try to love me just a little, and give me a chance to make you mine completely? Think it over, only try me, and you will never regret it! May, you don't quite hate me, do you?"

Quickly she rose to her feet, and looking down upon him with scarlet cheeks and brimming eyes, began, tremulously: "How can you, after loving such a pure, sweet saint? How disappointed I am in you! I thought—

But he interrupted her: "I do not forget, and I can love you as I say, even after loving and losing my little Princess. Here is her letter, which I have sworn should never be read by other eyes. Read it, and understand."

Slowly she read each line, and instead of speaking, reached into the basket and pulled out the letter she had just hidden, and handed it to him.

He rose and stood beside her, and opened it wonderingly, then started at the familiar handwriting.

"Dear Heart," it ran, "this is to beg forgiveness for the only wrong I ever did you. I was conscious of it at the time, but my only excuse was that we loved each other so. He is all in life to me, and I cannot do without him. But I read the secret that you hid from every one and even tried to hide from yourself. You, whose nature is so much deeper than mine, love him with a love which is as an ocean to a raindrop compared with mine.

"You would be a fitting mate for him, but he doesn't realize it, and I am wicked enough to let him waste his great heart on my puny love. This is a great injustice to both of you, and I should have set you both right, but I was too weak. I could not. Forgive me, May, and try to think well of me in spite of this.

"Humbly,
"PRINCESS."

His hand trembled as he gave it back to her. Then looking into her eyes, he said: "What do you think of me, May?"

Looking down at the violets, she said softly: "I think that Princess knew better than either of us."

He snatched her to his breast, and as he rained passionate kisses on the blushing, upturned face, he realized that he had attained unto a perfect love which even the hand of Death could never part asunder.

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IN EFFECT JUNE 11, 1905.

This condensed schedule is published as information and is subject to change without notice to the public.

TRAINS LEAVE RALEIGH, N. C.

No. 111.

1.40 a. m.—Daily from Goldsboro and local points. Carries Pullman sleeper Goldsboro to Winston-Salem, connecting at Greensboro with train No. 33, "Florida Express," for Charlotte, Columbia, Savannah and Jacksonville. Close connection is made with No. 37, "Washington and South western Limited," said Pullman train drawing room sleepers, New York to New Orleans and Memphis, connection is also made for Winston-Salem, Wilkesboro.

No. 112.

5.15 a. m.—Daily for Goldsboro and local stations, connecting at Goldsboro with Atlantic Coast Line, also with Atlantic and North Carolina Railway.

No. 117.

7.00 a. m.—Daily for Richmond and local stations, hauling through coaches between Raleigh, Chase City and Richmond, where connection is made with Southern Railway for Washington, Baltimore and eastern cities.

No. 107.

8.45 a. m.—Daily for Greensboro and local stations, connects at Durham for Oxford, Henderson, Keyville and Richmond. At University Station for Chapel Hill daily except Sunday. At Greensboro with train No. 36, U. S. "Fast Mail" for Washington. Pullman drawing room sleepers to New York and Richmond; close connection for Winston-Salem, Mocksville and local stations, with train No. 7 for High Point, Salisbury, Charlotte and local stations.

No. 108.

10.30 a. m.—Daily for Goldsboro and all local points, connects at Selma for Wilson, Rocky Mount and all Eastern North Carolina points. At Goldsboro for Wilmington, Kinston, New Bern, N. C., and Norfolk, Va., for Chesapeake Line for Baltimore and all other outgoing steamers.

No. 135.

3.30 p. m.—Daily for Greensboro and intermediate stations, connects at Durham for Oxford, Clarksville, Keyville daily except Sunday. At University Station for Chapel Hill, daily with train 39 for Columbia and Jacksonville. Pullman sleeper and first class coaches Washington to Jacksonville, Fla. No. 35, "U. S. Fast Mail," for Atlanta and all points South and Southwest. Pullman drawing room sleepers to Birmingham and New Orleans; day coaches Washington to New Orleans, also with northbound trains Nos. 34 and 38 for Washington and all points North. Pullman drawing room sleepers and observation car to New York; connection is also made at Greensboro for Winston-Salem and at Salisbury for Memphis.

No. 136.

4.36 p. m.—Daily for Goldsboro and local stations.

W. H. TAYLOR.

Gen. Pass. Agt., Washington, D. C.
T. E. GREEN, City Ticket Agt.,
Up-town Ticket Office.