

LOVE AND LAW.

By the author of BONNY'S LOVERS.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

My heart sank as I remembered the incident of last evening, the evidently clandestine meeting in the shrubbery at Forest Lea. Could this journey be connected with that meeting, and could the timid, modest girl I had known at Forest Lea be capable of planning and carrying out secret arrangements, surrounded by so many difficulties in her circumstances? What did it mean?

The endless green panorama still flitted by; not a sound, save the occasional rustling of a newspaper, broke the silence of the railway carriage; the passengers were either sleepy or unobtainable. An irrepressible desire to speak to Miss Branscombe possessed me—I could bear the situation no longer. I turned toward her with the paper I had been reading in my hand, intending to offer it to her. She was already occupied with a book—one of those thin paper-covered volumes bought at book-stalls—and she did not raise her eyes from it or otherwise appear to have noticed my movement. There was no doubt of her wish to ignore our previous acquaintance. And a conclusive further proof of her identity was given me in her dress, which I now had the opportunity of seeing more distinctly. It was of a brownish shade, and the pattern a little check—a simple girlish costume which I remembered she had worn in the morning of the day Col. Branscombe died. Could I forget the least detail connected with her?

A sudden inspiration flashed through my mind. Miss Branscombe had sought this method of communicating with me privately, away from her family circle, and the reserve she maintained was necessary for the moment in the presence of our fellow-passengers, some of whom might be known to her by sight at least. When the proper moment arrived she would explain herself. I

"Young lady not coming back, sir?" said one of them, a portly squire, with a humorous twinkle in the corner of his eye. "She's left her cloak and her bag"—pointing to the latter where it lay on the floor. "Not coming back—eh!"

"I suppose not," I answered as indifferently as I could, stooping to pick up the dropped volume. On the fly-leaf was written in pencil the name "Nona Branscombe."

CHAPTER VII.

"Five minutes past four," I said to myself as I sprang out on to the platform at Euston Station. "I shall just have time to report myself at the office before Rowton leaves, get a feed somewhere, and catch the 6:30 back to Forest Lea. Here, hansom—as fast as you can drive to Chancery Lane!"

My plans had been rapidly formed in the time which elapsed between Miss Branscombe's disappearance at Molton Junction and my arrival at Euston. If Miss Branscombe intended to return to Forest Lea that night, reference to Bradshaw had shown me that it must be by the 6:50 train from town—there was no other stopping at Westford; and if she did not return from that mysterious errand—which I could no longer flatter myself was in any way connected with me—then my presence at Forest Lea might be urgently needed. Such testimony as I could give as to Miss Branscombe's movements might be of the utmost consequence if she was to be saved from some unknown villainy of Charlie Branscombe's. I shuddered at the thought of her possible danger in his hands, and urged my caddy to swifter speed over the rattling London streets. James Rowton received me with open arms.

"Awfully glad you've come back, old man; the chief is still laid up, and I find myself up to my ears in work."

Gladstone. "I have never been at Venice, and"—examining it more closely—"this is not my bag; the key doesn't fit."

"Whew—w!" whistled my partner. "A case of 'exchange no robbery.' You've bagged somebody else's, and he's bagged yours"—laughing at his own pun. "Awfully disgusted he'll be when he sees the documents."

"It's an impossibility," I ejaculated. "The bag was put into the carriage and taken out again by my own hands, and it never left my sight throughout the journey. It was on the opposite seat. I can swear there's been no mistake. It's a robbery! Send for the police."

The words died on my lips. A terrible suspicion darted into my mind. Nona Branscombe had carried a black bag—a Gladstone, the facsimile of mine—and I had deposited it beside my own on the vacant seat. In her precipitate flight she had taken the bag, leaving cloak and book behind her, and, as I remembered now, effectually covering up the Gladstone she had left. In her agitation she had evidently exchanged the bags by mistake.

"Robbery? Nonsense—it's a case of exchange!" persisted James Rowton. "Can't you remember who had the other? Did he come all the way?"

"Yes," I said confusedly, putting my hand to my head. "I remember; she got out at Molton."

"She!" echoed my partner. "Was it a woman? And with a Gladstone!"

"Yes," I answered, heartily vexed with myself for the involuntary admission, "it was a woman. I'll go back to Euston and wire to Molton at once. The mistake may have been discovered and my bag left there; and I will follow the message by the first train."

"Off again?" exclaimed Rowton ruefully. "There's a week's fare here"—pointing to a pile of documents which filled the table.

"Can't help it!" I retorted. "The funeral takes place the day after tomorrow. I must be present to read the will, take executor's instructions, and so on; and there is other business which must be attended to."

"Can't I run down?" proposed Rowton. "Is the heiress there? I should like to see her."

"I must find the will," I replied. "There's no time to be lost. The Colonel gave me special instructions; I am bound to be present—other things must wait."

"You're off then?" said Rowton, reluctantly. "Well, ta-ta, old fellow! Wire when you've got the bag. It's an awful joke, though—such a sell for the lady."

"Don't let the chief hear of it," I stopped to request as I left the office, the fatal bag in my hand—"it would upset him."

"All right," nodded the chief's nephew. "It was an awfully flat thing to do, you know, Port—to let a woman run off with the old Colonel's will. And a steady-going fellow like you, too! Now, if it had been I—"

I stayed to hear no more. My hansom was waiting, and my Jarvie received his instructions to hurry back to Euston with the equanimity of his order. What did it matter if all the world had gone mad so long as his fare was a good one?

My message was soon dispatched, and whilst I waited for the answer I made my way to the refreshment room. But, notwithstanding my long fast, I was too fevered and excited to eat, and could only swallow a glass of wine and break a biscuit. Then I hovered impatiently about the door of the telegraph office, musing on the complication which this unlucky accident had brought into the whole affair.

(To be continued.)

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CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

My hitherto matter-of-fact life had suddenly received its "baptism" of mystery and romance; and with it another initiation—that supreme revelation which comes but once in a man's life, and having come, leaves its mark upon it forever—the revelation of love.

"Your message, sir," said the telegraph clerk at my elbow. I tore open the yellow envelope, and read—

"Molton Junction—No Gladstone bag left here, or inquired for to-day."

Then Miss Branscombe had not discovered her mistake. Moreover, her destination was some point beyond Molton, or she would certainly have had time to detect the change of baggage.

I sent a message to Miss Elmslie at Forest Lea, announcing my return that night and requesting that if convenient a carriage might meet me at the station, and then I prepared to get through as best I might the hours of suspense which lay before me.

My heart beat faster as the evening express neared Molton Junction. I was on the platform almost as soon as the train stopped. The station was unusually quiet, and the platform clear from one end to the other; there was no sign of the slight, graceful figure for which I sought eagerly. I did not give up hope until the last moment. After a hurried inquiry at the cloak room I lingered by the carriage door until the train was absolutely in motion, and then resumed my seat with a blank chill of disappointment. Miss Branscombe was evidently not returning to Forest Lea that night.

The loss of the will—serious as such a loss would be to me both personally and professionally—occupied no place in my mind as I traveled on toward Forest Lea. I believe I had entirely forgotten the lesser misfortune in what seemed to me the greater—the disappearance of Miss Branscombe from her home. That she was the victim of some deeply laid plot on the part of her cousin I never doubted; the rector's precautions had been taken too late. Possibly had I spoken of last evening's discovery, Miss Branscombe's

can bear, she's dying. She was a very old lady, and she's been bad this six months or more. She was took worse tonight."

I groaned inwardly. Then the rector's help was lost at this critical juncture. It was a fatality; I must tell my story to Miss Elmslie, and that without a moment's loss of time. From her I might gain the information necessary to put me on the track of the misguided girl.

Miss Elmslie met me at the door of the little morning room devoted to her use and Miss Branscombe's; there was no sign of agitation or anxiety in her manner—nothing but cordiality and satisfaction at my appearance.

"So good of you, Mr. Fort, to come back so soon!" she exclaimed. "And how tired you must be after your two journeys! I am glad you were able to return to us at once. We need your help more than ever, for we have had another shock tonight. The poor dear rector has been called away to—his mother's death bed. Ah, the little is full of sorrowful things! But come in, Mr. Fort—as I stood rooted to the threshold. "Come in to the fire. What—what is the matter?"

What, indeed? No wonder that I stared with dropped jaw and wonder-stricken eyes, for in an arm chair by the fire, which the chilly evening rendered comfortable, I beheld Nona Branscombe.

CHAPTER VIII.

Yes, it was Nona Branscombe in the flesh, and not a spirit, as in my first utter bewilderment I had half imagined. She was wrapped in a light fleecy shawl; her face was pale as death, and her whole attitude full of listless weariness. She looked like one who had wept until she could weep no more, and had given up the struggle with grief out of sheer exhaustion. I fancied that a faint wave of color stole over the pale cheeks as she held out her hand to me, but she did not speak, and sank back again amongst her cushions.

Miss Elmslie pressed food and drink upon me with kindly hospitality, and talked in her purring cheery way,



"IN AN ARMCHAIR NEAR THE FIRE I BEHELD NONA BRANSCOMBE."

guardians would have been on the alert and this evening's escapade would have been prevented. A girl, inexperienced, innocent, confiding—as, in spite of all, I could swear Nona was—might have been drawn into any step, however extreme—even into a hasty and secret marriage—by the fascinating and clever spendthrift to whom she had given her girlish affection, believing him to be unjustly disinherited—in her own favor.

Only a few hours had elapsed since her flight, however. Was it too late to save her? Hardly. There could be no marriage before the morning, if so soon. I would go at once to the rector and give him the clue I held. It was just possible—a dozen things were possible.

The cool night wind blowing upon my heated brow, as I sat once more behind the splendid chestnut, seemed to let light and air together in on the subject and to lift me out of the subject into which I had sunk. Hope came to my heart. I was impatient to confer with the rector. No, it was certainly not too late, I decided.

The rector was close to the gates of the Lea. I directed my Jehu to stop there first.

"I have to see the rector," I explained. "They have not gone to bed. I see lights!"

"The rector, sir?" said the man, pulling up, however. "Mr. Heathcote went to Howmere just as I started to fetch you. He was sent for, and he'll not be back yet, even if he comes tonight. It's a good ten mile to Howmere."

"Sent for!"—then it was all right. I breathed a devout thanksgiving. Her guardian had followed Nona—she was safe.

The man's next words demolished this hope.

"It's his mother, sir. From what I

"How very awkward," said Miss Elmslie, "for the lady as well as for you! Dear me, Mr. Fort, I hope you will soon get back your own property. Can we send to the station in the morning? Or is there now anything you want for tonight. Austin can attend to it if you will ask him."

"Thank you," I replied, "the bag contained nothing but papers."

"Papers!" exclaimed Miss Elmslie. "Then you must be very anxious, Mr. Fort. Do let us send—or had you not better go yourself?"

"Thank you," I responded; "I have no doubt I shall recover everything—in the morning."

"How cool you are!" said Miss Elmslie. "I should be in a fever."

"I think I will go to bed now," said Miss Branscombe, rising languidly from her chair.

"I will come up stairs with you," said Miss Elmslie, starting up and taking Nona's arm in her own. "I shall not say good-night, Mr. Fort; you have not finished your supper. Please don't hurry—I am coming back."

Miss Branscombe bowed and held out a limp, nerveless hand as I opened the door for her exit. She shivered just a little, too, and drew her shawl more closely about her, but there was neither guilt nor confusion—only weariness and sorrow—in the eyes which met mine for an instant. Then the two ladies crossed the hall and mounted the wide shallow stairs.

Miss Elmslie came down presently. "Poor child," she said, "she is absolutely worn out! She has cried the whole day. I hope she will sleep now; that is the best restorer. She has had no sleep yet."

My first glance on gaining my bedroom was toward the Gladstone bag which stood beside my portmanteau. Nona had probably taken the opportunity of making the exchange quietly in my absence—she had shown herself a person of resources, and I had little doubt that this would be her line of action. It would involve no explanation of awkwardness. I lifted the bag almost with a smile—the adventure interested me. There at the bottom was still the half-effaced label—"Hotel—gia, Venezia." Miss Branscombe then had in some way failed to be equal to the occasion; possibly she had been, as Miss Elmslie expressed it, too "worn-out" to attempt the transfer that night.

I opened my portmanteau, and there amongst my own possessions lay the large light gray dust cloak and the yellow paper-covered volume left behind by my traveling companion; there were the penciled words, "Nona Branscombe"—tangible evidence that the day's adventure had been no illusion or case of mistaken identity, as I was half tempted at times to believe. I fell asleep, after much troubled tossing, and dreamt of Nona Branscombe, at the Colonel's funeral, wrapped in her gray dust cloak, and carrying in her hand my Gladstone bag, with "Venezia" in large letters on it.

(To be continued.)

INTERESTING ITEMS.

Great Britain pays \$90,000,000 annually to America and the English colonies for butter. The people who buy high-price butter want it sweet and fresh, and this is possible only when the cows are eating spring grass. As it is not always spring in England it stands to reason that butter has to be brought from those places where spring is. First the Londoner gets his butter from west England, Normandy and Brittany. Then the butter of northern Denmark follows and Australian butter comes next—English winter is Australian spring.

In a recent lecture by Dr. Charles B. Dudley, chief chemist of a certain railroad, it is shown how the costs of the distinctively little things mount up in the offices of a large railway system. For instance, he shows that it costs the railroad each year about \$1,000 for pins, \$5,000 for rubber bands, \$5,000 for ink, \$7,000 for lead pencils, etc. The fact that it costs nearly as much for stationery with which to carry on the business as it does for iron, as Dr. Dudley asserts, is indeed startling. Some roads have realized the extent of waste in such directions and have, among other measures, ordered that a large part of the communications between their various officials shall be written on pads of manila paper instead of on regular letter heads.

There is no one from John O'Broat's to Land's End, England, who bestows more of his means to philanthropic causes than Lord Overton, to whom his father, James White, left a fortune, closely approaching \$10,000,000. Seventy-odd years ago the father of Lord Overton and his brother John took possession of an old soap and soda works near Rutherglen and converted it into a factory for the production of bichloride of potash. It is related of the founder of the business that he was wont to stand inside the gate of his works at night and if he found any particles of chrome—a chemical for which he received 20 cents a pound in those days—adhering to boots or clothes he would stop the man with the remark: "Hey, man! gang back and daud your shin. Div ye no see ye're carryin' awa' siller when ye carry crum on yer bits?" John Campbell White, the present owner of the chemical works at Rutherglen, was created first Baron Overton in 1893, taking the title from his estate in Dumbartonshire. He was born in 1843 and was educated at Glasgow university. He is certainly one of the busiest men in the country, and besides being a deputy lieutenant and convener for Dumbartonshire, is president of innumerable religious and philanthropic societies.



"IT WAS NONA HERSELF."

knew what fruitless attempts she had already made to enlist me on her side.

This idea did not perhaps remove the primary and greatest difficulty of the situation, but I hailed it eagerly. It gave Miss Branscombe the loophole which my love demanded. I was content to wait my lady's pleasure—nay, I was more than content—I forgot all the doubts and fears which had harassed me a moment ago in the rapturous delight of the thought that she trusted me, she turned to me for help in her difficulties. A man in love will forgive any indiscretion of which he is himself the object and by which he profits.

The train sped on, the afternoon shadows lengthened. The express stopped at few stations on its rapid journey, and, as one after the other of these halting places was passed without a sign from Miss Branscombe, I began to conclude that her destination was the same as my own—or, was she only sitting out the fellow-passengers, not one of whom had left us?

The question was presently answered in a startling and unexpected manner. Molton, a large busy junction, was reached. We were on the point of leaving it again after a three minutes' halt, when Miss Branscombe, with a hurried glance at the platform, started to her feet, and before I could assist or prevent her, she had snatched her bag from the opposite seat, beckoned to a passing porter, and left the carriage as she had entered it—swiftly and suddenly.

I sprang after her.

"Just starting sir—time's up!" called the porter.

I gave little heed to the warning; but a stream of passengers just arrived by the branch line interposed between me and Miss Branscombe, the whistle of the express sounded, and the remembrance of Col. Branscombe's will, left behind me in the carriage, recalled me to my duty. I dashed back just in time, mad with disappointment and baffled curiosity, and regained my seat in a condition which roused my somnolent fellow-travelers.

The junior was not fond of work.

"There's that case of Rose versus Emery—you know all about it, I suppose, and old Mrs. Entwistle's estate, and Sir Everard Brimbone's settlements—they are all on me like a pack of wolves. Morton, from Morton and White's, has been in three times today. Sir Everard wants the thing pushed on—marriage comes off at the end of the month. Wish people wouldn't get married! Fagged to death—ugh!"—rising and stretching himself. "Well, what's your news? Old man dead?"

"Yes," I said laconically, for his tone jarred upon me. "Colonel Branscombe's will is here"—pointing to my Gladstone bag. "We'd better take a copy, I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose so. What has the old fellow done—left everything to that rip of a nephew?"

"No," I answered unwillingly. Nora's name had become a sacred word to me, and I hesitated to pronounce it in such a presence.

"No? Then what has he done with the estate? I thought he had no other relations."

"He had a niece," I replied, fumbling for the key of my bag. "Oh, here it is!"—taking the key from my pocket. "Jennings must stay and make the copy, and send it down."

"A niece?" interrupted Rowton. "Who is she? Never heard of her. What's she like? Young or old? Does she come in for the land and all? Why don't you speak out, man?"

"I—I will in a moment," I rejoined. "What on earth is the matter with this key?"—holding it up to the light.

"Something in the barrel—dust, I dare say," suggested Rowton carelessly. "But about the niece—I'm interested, Fort. Is she young and beautiful, and an heiress?"

"It's the lock," I exclaimed; "the key's right enough, and yet the bag has scarcely been out of my sight. What the—" I stared at my partner, whilst I felt every vestige of color leaving my cheeks. "This bag isn't mine; it's—look at this"—pointing to a half-effaced label of a foreign hotel adhering to the bottom of the