

IRENE'S VOW

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME.

CHAPTER I.

"What will my life be like, I wonder? I am almost tired of waiting to see what the future holds for me," said a sweet, blithe voice.

"Tired of waiting?" was the grave, slow reply, "tired of waiting. How old are you, Irene?"

"Seventeen and a half. I have been wondering ever since I was fifteen what fate had in store for me."

"The grave voice asked:

"Did I see you running after a white-winged butterfly this morning, and did you not spend an hour yesterday in teaching a starting to say something that sounded like a word?"

"Yes," and a ripple of laughter came with the reply.

"Last night you dressed a doll for the miller's little daughter, did you not?"

"Yes, I—"

"Yes, and much pleased she was when I took it to her this morning. She put it in a little boat, and sent it sailing down the mill stream. I heard you tell Susan that if she forgot everything else in the world she was to remember to purchase a blue ribbon for your white kitten—was it not so?"

"Yes; Minnie is just as fond of blue ribbon as I am. Why do you ask me all these questions?"

"It comforts me. I might feel frightened at your ardent longing for life if I did not remember that you had the wares, like, dainties and pursuits of a child. If you were wise, Irene, you would keep to the butterflies, kittens and dolls. Life holds so much; but, child, it holds more pain than pleasure."

"Old people say so, not young ones," was the reply.

"And who should know so well as old people—who know what a battle life has been so well as the person who has fought it? Which can tell best what the battle is—the young soldier, or the old warrior, Irene?"

The two speaking were Irene Darcy and Mrs. Cotrel, her grandmother—Irene in the first flush of lovely girlhood—Mrs. Cotrel on whose worn face the light of heaven was already shining. A pretty group, the elder lady in her easy chair, sitting where the lime trees threw a light, half green, half golden, near a great sheaf of white lilies, over which the white-winged butterflies hovered; and the girl, more beautiful than a poet's dream, sat on the grass at her feet. The shining sun, the fragrant flowers, the song of birds, were all so many sweet sources of delight to her.

Mrs. Cotrel went over again the one passionate sorrow of her life. She had not loved her husband very dearly, although he was one of nature's gentlemen—a scholar, and a noble, kindly hearted man. For many years he had been Vicar of Branley, and died, leaving his wife and only child, Alice, fairly provided for.

On his death Mrs. Cotrel went to live at a pretty villa called Fernside, where she devoted herself to the one great love of her life—her daughter. Some women empty their hearts and lavish all their love on their husbands, others on their children. Mrs. Cotrel was one of the latter. They lived happily enough, mother and daughter, their simple lives filled with simple pleasures, until the shadow that falls over the lives of all women fell over theirs, and she who, in her mother's eyes was a child, fell in love with a young artist who came to Branley in search of the picturesque.

Santon Darcy came like other artists came, but, unlike them, he remained; for, one evening, as he was sketching a glorious mass of golden cloud, that seemed to rest on the green hilltop, there came to him what he thought at first a vision.

A fair-faced, fair-haired girl, who, descending the hill, looked as though she had just left the golden cloudland. He said to himself if she would but stand still, and he could in sketching her add a pair of white wings, she would look like an angel. It seemed as though she understood his thoughts, for half way down the hill, with the light of the golden cloudland round her, she stood quite still, shading her eyes with one white hand, and as she stood there, he remembered her until the tragedy was ended.

Years afterward he was at an evening party and someone sang Gounod's beautiful song, "There is a green hill far away," and his thoughts went back to the beautiful cloudland, to the golden light on the green hillside, to the tall, slender figure, to the fair face shaded with one white hand, and he rose with a cry of bitter pain, unable even to hear the words. Someone asked what was wrong with the gifted artist, and the answer was that he had never been the same since his young wife died. For that was the tragedy that darkened his life—the death of the fair-haired, fair-faced girl, who had seemed to him on that summer evening to come out of the golden cloudland.

They were very happy for one brief year; Alice was always blithe and gay. She laughed the sweetest, and every laugh when her husband told her how he had first seen her coming out of the golden cloudland.

"Those same golden clouds may open and take me back again, Santon," she said, and without the least consciousness of the prophecy of her own words.

The prophecy came true one year later, when Irene was born. They laid the new born babe in its mother's arms just as she was breathing her last.

"Santon," she whispered, "you will bring my baby to heaven." And when they looked next the smile on the white lips was the smile of a soul who was with the angels in heaven.

There are no words in which such grief as theirs could be told. To the artist husband life was never the same again. So other love came to him, no woman's face charmed him; he was true to his wife dead as he had been to her living. As time wore on the hot, quick passion of his grief gave way to settled melancholy. He lived in the world, but not of it, so that he could take Alice's baby to heaven. He kept himself pure and stainless as a child, so that one day he might enter the beautiful cloudland, holding the little one by the hand, and place her in the outstretched arms of his wife. No false or light words, no mean actions, tarnished that innocent life; if a tempta-

tion came to him he baffled it with these words: "No, I must take the baby to Alice in heaven." Ah, happy man, with such a guardian.

Baby grew strong and beautiful; she had her mother's dainty loveliness, with fire and spirit that gentle lady had never known. To say she was worshipped in that little household would be to express but lightly the place she held—father, grandmother and servants vied with each other as to who should be the first to carry out her wishes, whims and caprices. Her beauty and grace grew with her as did the love of those who loved her. It was only when she reached the age of seventeen and he found that her beauty was wondrous and exceeding that of most women, that the dreamy, melancholy artist realized it would not be so easy as he thought to take baby to Alice in heaven.

There was one spot above all others where Irene loved to dream, and that was a leafy, lonely corner, where a pretty brook sang of all the pleasant spots it had wandered through; a laughing brook, whose clear waters showed the pebbles and weeds, and ran between two green banks, kissing them as it ran.

Irene left her grandmother's side and came here to dream, and the dreams were all of the future, that was to her full of music as the bird's song. She laughed aloud when she reached the pretty brook side. She looked down into the clear, bright waters.

"The brook is not a living thing," she said—"at least, it is not living as we are; but I believe honestly that it knows me better than grammar does. I am seventeen, and that is not quite young, not as young, at least, as fifteen or sixteen; and she really thinks that I care for butterflies and kittens. Ah, if she knew how intensely I long for real life—life that has love and lovers in it. How old was Juliet, I wonder, when she saw Romeo? And, ah, little brook, you have heard my thoughts ever since I had any thoughts, tell me what has life in store for me?"

The bright, laughing water sang on through the grass, and it seemed to her that it whispered:

"Love, love, nothing but love."

The sound was so pleasant to her, she laughed aloud in her glee.

"Love, love, nothing but love," she repeated. "What a pretty story for any laughing brook to tell."

The song of a bird took her attention from the rippling water.

"Little bird," she asked, raising her charming golden head, "little birds tell the truth, they say—what does life hold in store for me? I know what it holds in store for you—a summer's love, dew to drink, a warm nest, and the sun to warm you; then flight over the blue sea, and another summer in a fairer land. But what is there for me?"

The little bird looked down with infinite wisdom in its bright blue eyes, and it seemed to her that the burden of its song was:

"Title and gold, title and gold."

"That would be very pleasant," she said, naively, as though the little bird had spoken as an oracle; "but I like love the best."

The brook sang, the leaves rippled, the birds poured out rich, clear melody, the golden sun shone, the flowers shook their tiny blossoms, the wind danced over the shining grass, while the girl sat by the water-side dreaming of the lover to come.

The singing waters gave her no warning, they did not say that true love was a rose surrounded by sharp thorns, that love brought more pain than pleasure, that love was a tragedy. The bright-eyed bird did not tell her how often women's hearts were broken, and that love was often the crown of sorrow.

CHAPTER II.

The lengthening shadows of the willow tree told Irene that she had been here long enough. She laughed aloud to herself as she thought what the grammar would say if she knew that for one whole hour she had been lingering by the brook-side, dreaming of the lover to come.

Then she started abruptly and arose from her pretty seat, for a dog racing a squirrel and barking furiously rushed past her and two gentlemen followed the dog.

"Where is my lover?" was the last thought she remembered before the noise and confusion of the frightened squirrel, the barking dog, the hurried footsteps. "He is here," was the next thought that occurred to her mind, for looking up she saw the sunlight falling on the very hero of her dreams.

She saw two gentlemen, one tall and stately, with the dignified, easy grace and bearing that distinguishes a soldier, with broad shoulders, with a grand, well-cut frame, with a face handsome in its dark beauty. The brow was broad and ideal, with eyebrows that almost met; the eyes were dark gray with indistinguishable color and beauty of expression; eyes that no woman could resist; she saw a proud mouth, yet it had in it the grace and sweetness of a woman's.

"He is here," she thought to herself; "he is just as I have pictured him in my dreams."

"I am afraid we startled you," said a deep voice.

"It is my fault," said another voice. "Did I see a terrible dog for squirrels, and I ought to have left him at home."

"I am not startled now," said Irene.

"But you were," protested the gentleman to whom the dog belonged.

Looking up she saw him, and half wondered in that one moment whether he belonged to the same world as this—the hero of her dreams.

"I know that you were frightened," he persisted, "all the color left your face and you are trembling even now."

"It is not that," she answered simply.

"So simply that the same thought of reverence went through the minds of both—this was a girl, half angel, half child. Both involuntarily took off their hats and stood bareheaded before her.

She, with wide open eyes, checked herself. It was not that—not so much the noise of the dog that startled her as she was alarmed by the emotion aroused in her own heart by the sight of that dark, beautiful face.

Her senses were all awake and she

looked from one to the other, taking in every detail of their appearance with a comprehensive glance. From the dark, handsome face and keen, gray eyes she looked to a fair Saxon face neither very handsome nor very plain. They were both gentlemen, she knew, from their dress and manner.

The fair-faced stranger went on: "I have liked my dog, Dido, all my life," he said; "and I am angry with him for the first time."

"It was not the dog's fault," she answered.

The dark face was turned to hers, and the deep, clear voice said: "I think we ought to be very grateful to Dido; but for her indiscretion in barking, we should not have enjoyed this pleasant meeting."

"I do not call it pleasant when it has frightened a young lady," said the fair-haired stranger. "I would rather have foregone the pleasure of seeing her than have caused her pain."

Irene looked at him; his face pleased her, although it lacked the dark beauty that seemed to her the most perfect; the expression was simple, honest and true; the eyes clear and candid, the mouth firm and gentle. He drew a card from his card case.

"As Dido trespassed, and he belongs to me, allow me to introduce myself, and apologize for him."

Irene took the card and read the name; she looked at him with a simple reverence that touched him.

"You are Lord Arundale," she said; "I know your name as well; you bought some of my father's pictures."

"Your father?" said Arundale; "is he an artist? Who is he? The only artist I know here is Santon Darcy."

She looked at him with unutterable pride.

"I am Santon Darcy's daughter," she said, and he could have smiled at the pride in her voice.

"I do not know where your father lives," he said. "I purchased his pictures at the academy. It was only a few days since that I heard he resided in this neighborhood. I shall be pleased to see him."

His reward for his kindly words was the sweet mist of tears that rose to her eyes, and then the one with the dark, handsome face said some fine words to her. Lord Arundale was impatient while they were uttered.

"I shall hope to see you again when I call upon Mr. Darcy," he said; "it will not be long until then."

"Darcy," said the young man, "Why, that is the name of the Melancholy Artist; they call him in town. All his pictures are sad and tragic."

She turned her lovely face, so full of light, to him.

"That is because my mother died and left him," she said. "He has never laughed since, and it is seventeen years since."

"I have heard something of his story," said Lord Arundale; "and that which I have heard makes me like him better."

Then, with a few kindly words, he went away, trying, as far as it was possible, that no word should be exchanged between the young people.

He with the dark eyes, she heard his name afterward, Sir Hubert Estmere—looked at her as he went away.

"He is going," she thought; "I have seen him, and now he is going."

Her face grew white as death and a shadow came over her eyes. She had seen him, met him, the hero of her dreams, the king who was to crown her life with his love had come, and was going. Would she ever see him again? What had it been for, this swift, sudden emotion, if all was to die away at once, and he was to pass out of her sight?

When, finally, he vanished under the shade of the green trees it seemed to her that her heart ceased beating and life was standing still. For many minutes she was incapable of moving, then she called herself with a sigh. How foolish it was; it was but a fancy. What could the face of a stranger be to her that she should weep all these romances about it? Yet the song of the little brook had changed, the flowers had grown fairer, the bird's song had deeper meaning, the light was brighter. The girl tried to rouse herself, a spell had fallen over her.

"What is wrong with me?" she said. "I have seen a face, nothing more."

She lingered by the water-side, dreaming always of the dark, handsome face, and suddenly a footstep came quickly over the bracken and ferns. There was no time to look, the sudden beating of her heart, the sudden brightness that fell over her, the sudden music that seemed to leap and quiver in the air, all told the same story—he was there—he had come back again for one word with her. The dark, handsome face, flushed with exertion, was bending over her, and he spoke in hurried tones.

"Lord Arundale did not introduce me," he said. "The best knows why. Let me introduce myself; I am Sir Hubert Estmere; I am staying at Arundale Hall, and a very dull place I find it. I grew quite tired of it until to-day."

She was looking at him with a strange mixture of pleasure, wonder and fear.

"I saw that Lord Arundale did not wish me to speak to you," he said; "he is absurdly particular in some things, so is Lady Arville, his wife. I could not help returning. I longed for one word with you."

Her face was covered with a burning flush; her hands trembled. She would have made him some indifferent answer, but the words died away on her lips, leaving her mute and dumb.

"Have I displeased you by returning?" he asked gently. "If so, I will go at once."

"No, I am not displeased," she answered. "You startled me."

And the lovely eyes seemed to drop from his with the burden of their own light and secret. She thought of what he would say or think if he knew her thoughts had made her heart beat, and she looked so shy, so sweet in her dainty, delicate loveliness that Sir Hubert lost his heart to her.

"Tell me," he cried, in a passionate whisper, "will you be here by the brook-side at this same hour to-morrow? I must see you again."

She sealed her own fate, she wrote the first line of a tragedy, she began the dream of life when she answered, slowly and quietly:

"Yes."

(To be continued.)

HUMOR OF THE WEEK

STORIES TOLD BY FUNNY MEN OF THE PRESS.

Odd, Curious and Laughable Phases of Human Nature Graphically Portrayed by Eminent Word Artists of Our Own Day—A Budget of Fun.

"I suppose you are workmen out of a job," said the kind lady, as she divided a homemade pie between three tramps.

"Not so as you could notice it," replied the spokesman of the gang.

"Just at the present writing we are working women for interior department supplies. So long, ma'am."


Had the Remarks.

Cynicus—I read your spring poem in the last issue of Blank's Magazine.

Scribbles—That wasn't a spring poem.

Cynicus—Of course it was. That tired feeling got a strange hold on me before I had read half a dozen lines.

As Old Wives.



Softleigh—When I stand on my head the blood rushes to my head, doesn't it?

Hardleigh—Sure thing.

Softleigh—Now, when I stand on my feet why doesn't the blood rush to my feet?

Hardleigh—Probably because your feet are not hollow.

Mae's Originality.

"Mae will be original."

"Ah?"

"Yes, she sent old Bloatman a comic valentine by express."

"It must have been very heavy."

"Yes. It was a box of canned lobsters."

Practical Demonstration.

Frederick—I notice you have been associating with that young bard of late. Have you learned anything about poetry?

Van Albert—Oh, a little. Since he borrowed that X I understand what the true poetic touch is.

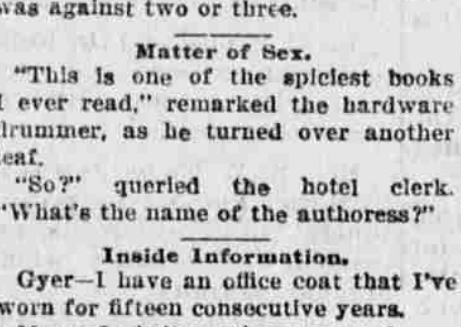
Pair of Gosses.

"Do you love me still?" asked the wife.

"I do, indeed," replied the husband.

Then she thought and he thought and she wondered if he meant it as she understood it and he wondered if she understood it as he meant it.

A Bad Admission.



Judge—Your face seems strangely familiar to me?

Prisoner—Well, your honor, two years ago I gave your daughter singing lessons.

Judge—Ten years.

His Excuse.

The Parson—Don't you know, my dear sir, that it is positively sinful to stand around wasting your time in this manner?

The Loufer—Yes; I know it is, parson, and I'm going to quit it just as soon as I find a comfortable place to sit down.

A Raging Belle.

Dolly—Polly, how many men have you been engaged to?

Polly—Oh, Dolly, I've lost count!

All in Chicago.

"They say that a person on the verge of delirium tremens dreams of creeping and crawling things."

"By Jove! I must be going to have an attack."

"Last night I dreamed of nothing but messenger boys, cassettes and cable cars."

Shy Rapid Transit.

Dorothy—What became of that bashful man and bashful girl you were telling me about?

David—Oh, I introduced them; and in three weeks they were engaged.

Fatherly Insight.

Polly—Pa, don't you think I will be a success in business life?

Pa—No, Polly, not unless you get a situation where you can boss the boss.

Handicapped.

Mrs. Homer—Were you troubled by mal de mer while crossing the ocean?

Mrs. Neurich—No, indeed. I was so seasick all the way over that I didn't even have a chance to make his acquaintance.

The Exposition Craze.

Purchaser—Are you sure this exposition stamp is the last edition?

Stamp Clerk—Yes, sir; but there will be another edition in a few hours.

The Flaw.

Helen—Delta wouldn't listen to anything but classical music for the world.

Judy—No; but look at the rag-time hat she wears!

Needed Diving.

"I am going to make him eat his words," roared the bad man of the town.

"Then you had better give him a knife and fork," suggested the bystander.

"Why so?"

"Because he is from Boston and his words are so long that they will choke him unless he cuts them up."

GOOD Short Stories

A lawyer who met Thomas B. Reed, the other day, remarked: "Mr. Reed, does it not seem to you that the discipline inflicted on Tillman and McLaughlin for their breaches of propriety was rather light?" "Oh, no," drawled the ex-Speaker; "it is the heaviest that could be imposed on a Senator—*silence.*"

Pure blood Indians in the City of Mexico are never seen riding on the electric cars. They go and come from the neighboring towns always on foot, or on the more sure and undecidable "burros." This is due to the horror the "devil-like" trains inspire in the Indians, and one of them, Manuel Juan, will hereafter fear an "electric" more than a "toro pantal," as he says, for he was recently run over by one of them, and saw his right ear roll away glued to the wheel.

Once during a heated debate between Senator Joseph B. Foraker, of Ohio, and Senator Joseph W. Bailey, of Texas, the question of law in Texas and law in Ohio came up. The passage became warm. Foraker, by way of a parting shot, told Bailey that if he would come to Ohio he would learn a great deal of law that he did not know. "If there is so very much law to be learned in Ohio," remarked Bailey, "I must advise the Senator to spend all his spare time there. He needs it."

The recent elections in Canada were bitterly contested, and efforts were made both by the Liberals and Conservatives to stir up race and religious prejudice. A Quebec Liberal, whose acquaintance with Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Canadian premier, was only political, sent this telegram to his leader, who was in Ontario on a speech-making tour: "Report in circulation in this country that your children have not been baptized. Telegraph denial." To which dispatch the premier sent this reply: "Sorry to say report is correct. I have no children."

The Courier des Etats-Unis says that on January 14, 1898, the late Francesco Crispi, the great Italian statesman, then a political refugee in Paris, received from an Italian friend connected with the Paris opera two gallery tickets for the performance of that evening, which the emperor and empress were expected to attend. Crispi and his wife were on the point of starting for the theater, when the latter exclaimed: "Francesco, where shall we get a candle?" They were in such destitution that they had neither candles nor matches, nor yet the wherewithal to buy them. Going to the opera would involve groping for their room at midnight, and going to bed in total darkness. Too proud to confess their condition and to borrow a few sous, they regretfully denied themselves the promised treat, remained in their room, and retired before the twilight had faded. On the following morning they learned of Orsini's attack on the emperor, the police raids, and the arrest of all Italian revolutionists found in or near the theater. If Crispi had been in the house he would certainly have been among the first arrested, for he was known as an ardent disciple of Mazzini.

Egyptian Girls at Play.

In her "Recollections of an Egyptian Princess" the author describes a little game at romps in the garden of the palace which discloses a very close touch of nature. The princess was seated near a little lake, which had been constructed in a serpentine shape, winding about under rustic bridges.

She was laughingly scolding one of her attendants, when the girl broke away, crying out, "My mistress is angry with me! I'll drown myself!" and rushed into the water.

The princess called out, "Oh, stop her! Stop her!" and three or four followed immediately. But the first knew well enough that the water was not more than three feet deep, so she had done it for a joke, and she turned round and threw water in the faces of her pursuers.

The princess had seen the joke directly after the cry had escaped her, and now joined heartily in the fun, and urged others to help in the capture. The general harem dress when warm weather set in was white Indian grass-cloth, more or less fine, made loose, and confined at the waist by a colored sash, a ribbon to match being usually worn round the throat, and to tie back the hair.

The dress could not be hurt by the immersion, but the ribbons might be spoiled. Some were seen to cast a glance on their pretty ties, which was a signal to those who saw the look to rush upon them at once and push them in.

There was nothing but screaming and laughing, several disporting themselves in the water, others pursued all over the garden, met at the cross-paths, turning and doubling on their pursuers. The princess clapped her hands with delight and laughed unrestrainedly, and the girls themselves were immensely pleased with the joke.

A Coolest.

"The boys all say I'm a 'brick,'" gushed the yellow-haired girl as she passed the cream to her lips.

The young man gazed sadly at the four empty saucers and said: "Then I guess you must be a brick of ice-cream."

The sadness of a man who has loved and lost is frequently exceeded by that of the poor unfortunate who loved and failed to lose.

Yield of Petroleum.

Russia's yield of petroleum is 68,000,000 barrels a year, and that of the United States 58,000,000.

A girl likes to think she burts all her male acquaintances when she announces her engagement.

Another Pipe Story.

Museum Manager—Where's the living skeleton? It's his turn to go on.

Middle Fatema—He lost his balance while washing his hands at the sink a moment ago and slipped down the waste pipe.