

# IRENE'S VOW

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME.

## CHAPTER XXI.

Sir Hubert followed Irene into the depths of the wood. Just for the time being his thoughts were going over and over again in fancy every scene he had ever had with Irene. If she would but forgive him, earth and heaven would seem to him to grow clearer, his heart lighter, his life brighter.

More than once, as he parted the branches, the gun that he carried so negligently caught more than once he said to himself that he must be more careful, or it would go off. Then he saw that she had reached a small, pretty opening in the wood, one evidently where human feet seldom trod.

"Irene," he called, and the sound of his voice died away in the tall ferns. "Irene," he called again, and this time hearing him, she turned quickly round; her face grew white with anger and scorn.

"He has followed his fancy," she said to herself bitterly.

"Irene, I want to speak to you for a few moments. I have followed you so long and so far."

"Great heaven! what followed?"

The scornful answer died on her lips. There was a sudden crash, a cry, the sharp ring of a shot, and he was lying in the long grass, with his face on the ground.

With her quick, keen instinct, she knew at once what had happened. In parting the branches of the trees to reach the open level his gun had caught, in trying to recover it he fell, and the contents of the gun entered his side.

He fell, wounded, but not mortally; all this she saw at a glance. A deep moan came from his lips, and she stood by in grief. With a desperate effort he turned over on his side and gasped for breath. The fall had not stunned him, but he was quite unable to move.

"Oh, help," he cried, "help!"

She did not move or stir, and then the strong man fainting from excess of pain. How long he lay in that swoon he did not know; it was the very torture of pain that woke him from it. He woke to find her still standing by him, mute, silent, motionless.

"Oh, help me," he cried; "Irene, help me!" He might as well have cried out to the grass, the ferns, the trees, for all the heed she took. "Irene," he cried again, while the great drops of agony and exhaustion fell from his brow.

"Irene, go quickly to the house and tell them what has happened; all the shot is here in my right side. Bid them bring a litter; I cannot move."

The words came out in gasps; he could scarcely breathe for pain. But the Duchess of Bayard did not move or speak; her face had grown very white, and there was a strange, defiant light upon it. He looked at her in wonder.

"Oh, Irene, hasten," he said. "I am in such pain, such terrible pain. My side burns as though it were on fire. Ah, help me quickly, or I shall die."

There was a gleam in her face that almost frightened him—it was a little like madness. Then she came a little nearer to him, and, bending down, looked into his face.

"Can you hear me?" she asked; "can you understand?"

"Yes, I hear, Irene. Help me, for heaven's sake!"

"Listen, you have read the Bible, perhaps, when you were a child at school. Do you remember that when strange nations fell into the hands of the Jews it was said that heaven had delivered them into the hands of their enemies? Do you remember that?"

"Yes," he gasped. "Help me, Irene!"

"As it happened to the Jews, so it has happened to me," she said; "you are delivered into my hands; you have fallen living into my hands."

"Oh, Irene, hasten for help for me!"

"No," she replied, slowly. "I shall bring no help to you."

"Bring no help!" he cried. "You are mad. I shall die if you do not."

"You must die," she replied. "The life of the body is as nothing compared to the life of the soul—less than nothing. You tried to kill my soul. You would have taken from me my good name and fair reputation, and it is just—heaven knows that it is just—that I, in my turn, should take from you the life of your body. It is just!" she cried, passionately.

His eyes grew livid with horror, his eyes terrible with fear.

"You cannot mean it, Irene. You are a woman, gentle and tender of heart. I know, dear. You are trying to frighten me. And I am sorry, sorry for my sin, sorry to my heart for the wrong I did you. I was following you just for that, Irene, to ask your pardon—to ask you to say that you had forgiven me. Do you know that if you leave me here, without help, I shall die the most cruel, lingering, torturing death?"

"As my soul would have died," she said, in a pitiless voice. "I swore to be revenged on you. I had but to speak one word to my husband and he would have set his heel on your face. That would have been merciful revenge. I prefer this."

"I would not believe you, Irene," he cried. "If you went on your knees and swore it."

She knelt down among the fern and dead plants.

"I swear that I will do it," she said, with the same strange gleam of defiance on her face. "I will leave you lying here to die in punishment of the wrong you did me."

"Irene," he said, "you are mad; you must be mad! Do you know that this would be murder?"

"It is vengeance," she said. "Righteous vengeance! I have thought over it by night and brooded over it by day, what I should do to be avenged; how I could reach you; how I could best make you feel; and now I exit that you are delivered over to me, bound, helpless as people were delivered to the tortures of old. It is righteous vengeance. You tortured my soul, I avenge myself on your body."

"Oh, heaven!" he cried. "Can this be true? To die while the sun shines, and the birds sing—to die here through the long, silent hours of day and night! Oh, Irene, for heaven's sake take pity on me, have mercy on me! Do you know," and he broke down with a terrible sob, "do

you know that it will take a week to die? I am so strong—ah, so strong! But you do not mean it. A man might do such a deed—no woman could."

Her face neither softened nor trembled; she looked quite as steadily at him.

"Say what you will, I shall leave you here to die; no prayers, no pleading will prevail, and what is more, I shall have the courage to come and see you die, just as, day by day, you watched the slow crushing of my soul."

"Is there no help for me?" he groaned.

"No, none. The sunbeams will be warm and bright over you; wondering birds, with bright eyes, will perch on the boughs overhead, and will watch you; the leaves will fall over you, and the wind murmur all the saddest songs in your ears. The hour will come when the same wind will bear your soul to the judgment seat—remember then the wrong you have done to me."

She turned slowly away. Before she quite left she drew from a pocket her little wedding ring, and scornfully tossed it toward him. He, lying there in his agony, watched the blue dress as it disappeared among the trees. He cried aloud as she went, uttering every imprecating word of which he could think as she went away, with the sound of those terrible cries ringing in her ears.

Back through the sunlight and gloom, through the tangled brake and the ferns, through the great forest aisles to the beaten track of the woods, one more under the blue sky with the fragrant air whispering round her—an altered woman. There was little trace in this haggard face of the duchess; all the exquisite coloring had faded, the lips were white, the wide-open eyes had a frightened, startled look, the dainty bloom and the freshness of the youth, the brightness had gone, leaving it like a stone mask.

She entered the house by the pretty side door in the rose garden. Almost the first person she met was the duke, who had returned from the shooting party. She averted her face lest, seeing it, he should mistake it for the face of the dead.

"Irene, my darling!" he cried, "where have you been? Your dress is covered with dust and grass."

Her heart almost stood still at the words. The pale face of the wounded man seemed to float before her, his voice to fill her ears. Then she remembered that she must be herself, that she must speak and act naturally, or he would suspect—suspect! Involuntarily she raised her white hands and looked at them to see if a red stain was on them.

Her husband saw the curious gesture, and, not dreaming of its cause, said to her:

"Are your hands dusty? We had no dust at Durnton—it has been a very pleasant day."

She mastered herself so far as to speak, but her voice was quite unlike any other sound; the horror of the scene was on her yet.

"I have been wandering about the grounds," she said. "I had a headache and could not talk."

He looked at her and cried out in genuine alarm.

"You do look ill, Irene; you must rest an hour before dinner. It is nearly five now."

Five! And she had left the wood at three. Ah, then, two hours of this mortal agony were over—two long, cruel, dreary hours.

"Have all the party returned?" she asked.

"All but Sir Hubert," he replied. "Lady Estmere seems anxious about him."

She could not help the horrible blanching of her face or the shaking of her hands.

"He did not go with us," continued the duke. "He followed us to Durnton; strange to say, we saw nothing of him. One of the keepers passed him in what is called the Lower Woods, and no one has seen him since. Without doubt he has made up a capital bag."

She knew that it was a mistake; no keeper could have seen him, for the best of all reasons—he was not there. The keeper must have seen someone else whom he mistook for Sir Hubert. She saw at once and quickly how the mistake would benefit her.

She went away, smiling to herself with bitter scorn, but she could not endure her terrible burden, from the horrible tragedy lonely room; she must go down to the ladies and talk to them—anything to make her forget, anything to take her thoughts from the greensward and its terrible burden, from the horrible tragedy, on which the sun was shining.

She met Lady Estmere in the hall, who went up to her with a wistful face.

"Duchess, she said, 'I was looking for you. I want a few words of comfort about my husband, Sir Hubert.'"

"What about him?" she asked, her lips burning, and so stiff she could hardly articulate.

"He followed the duke's party to Durnton, and none of them has seen him. I am afraid he has missed his way. I would give all I have in this world to see him just at this moment—I would, indeed. You always comfort everyone—comfort me."

"What comfort do you want? Are you so love sick that if your husband be a few minutes late you must fancy all kinds of evil things have happened to him?"

Lady Estmere looked up in wonder.

"How strange your voice is. Surely you are not well, and I am inclined to think that you are fanciful," she said.

"I hope I am, duchess, for I feel really unhappy about my husband. I had a strange feeling, a strange presentiment, when he was going away as though some evil was hanging over him."

"You are not well," said the duchess; "these fancies often come when one feels weak and languid."

The dinner bell rang, the duchess gathered up her dress of blue velvet, with its rich, trailing lace and diamond ornaments.

They talked much of Sir Hubert dur-

ing dinner, perhaps out of pity for the pale face of his young wife.

They laughed at the idea that anything had happened to him; perhaps carried away by love of sport, he had gone further into the wood and so had missed them; but that he should be lost was all nonsense. He would be here soon, laughing at his misadventure.

Ladies left the table, the gentlemen drew their chairs nearer together, the daylight faded out of the skies, and yet he had not returned; but they did not begin to feel really uneasy until 10 o'clock had struck and there was no sign of him.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

As the evening wore on and the beautiful face of the young wife grew pale, the gentlemen did their best to sustain their courage. Such things often happen, they said; Sir Hubert might have missed his way and sought a night's refuge in some of the neighboring villages or manors; he might have met with some friend who had detained him; he might have gone to spend the night with some of the neighbors, and have sent a messenger, who suggested themselves to them, all of which were possible and probable.

Earlier than usual that evening came to a close. No one seemed inclined for the usual evening's amusement, for dancing, charades or music. Although they would not apprehend danger there was no doubt that the absence of Sir Hubert weighed them down.

The greater part of the visitors retired early. The duke, with one of his footmen, went down to the keeper's cottage to send the men out to the woods. Lady Estmere went to her room, where her maid sat up to comfort her the greater part of the night, and the Duchess of Bayard went to rest. She had barely patience to wait while the maid took off that sumptuous dress of blue velvet, with its rich, trailing lace, and the diamonds with their shining light; she hurried her, and seemed possessed by the very spirit of impatience.

"I am going to read, Marcia," said her grace; "give me the blue dressing gown, and you can go."

But first she must take the diamond stars from the queenly head and brush out the silken shower of golden hair. More than once while that was being done the duchess asked the question:

"What kind of night is it, Marcia—does the moon shine?"

And each time the maid answered:

"No, your grace, it is dark yet; but the clouds are breaking over the moon."

More than once she started so violently that the golden waves of her hair were almost torn from the girl's hand.

"Did you hear a cry?" she would say.

And the maid's answer was always:

"No, your grace; it is the wind among the trees; the wind is high to-night."

At last the door closed and the maid was gone.

Irene was alone, and she locked the door, lest any interruption should come. She flew rather than walked to the window and opened it quickly; she leaned half out of it, and bent her golden head as though she was listening intently. Just then the clouds parted, and the moon shone out clear as day. Those silver beams never fell on any sight more tragic than the beautiful head and face framed in roses and passion flowers, bent with such eager, desperate intent.

The windows of her room looked toward that part of the woods where the living horror lay. She could not take her eyes from the group of trees that led to it. The wind stirred the branches, and they were like great arms stretching to her, like huge giants beckoning to her. She cried out with terror, and then the clouds parted still further, and the moon shone out clear and bright as day; it was as though a flood of living, clear silver had fallen over everything, and she knew—she knew now that light would fall on the upturned face, the dark, handsome face she had loved with such a passionate love, on the white hands that would now probably be tearing the grass and beating the ground in the wildest agony.

The moon would be shining down upon him; the light lying on his face and hair just as it lay on hers; the wind would whisper, and moan, and wail; the pure, pale stars with golden eyes would be watching him; the night birds singing over him; the hares pause in their leaping; the bright-eyed squirrels would halt in solemn wonder as they saw what lay on the ground.

She shuddered and trembled as she thought of it; she stretched out her hands to the east, where he lay. Her whole soul seemed to go out to him with a rush of pain. She clasped her hands as she cried to herself:

(To be continued.)

### Science Could Not Explain It.

A distinguished naturalist recently gave a dinner to a number of learned men. At the conclusion of the repast the company went into the garden, in the center of which stood a large glass globe, on a pedestal. Happening to touch this globe one of the guests discovered, to his amazement, that it was much warmer on the shady side than on the side facing the sun. He immediately communicated his discovery to his friends.

A warm argument sprang up, and in the course of the debate the phenomenon was attributed to the law of reflection or repulsion or something equally formidable.

The host, however, had his suspicion as to the correctness of these theories, and sent for his gardener. When he put in an appearance, the gentleman said:

"John, can you tell us why this globe is warmer on the shady than on the sunny side?"

"Well," replied the man, slowly, "the fact is, I just turned it round, for I was afraid that the heat would crack it."

### Art.

"A farmer ought to read a great deal, just the same as any business man."

"Yes," answered Farmer Courtmesol. "It keeps me so busy posting up on railroad rates and the tariff that I'm sometimes afraid I won't have time to raise the stuff to send to market."—Washington Star.

Whenever we hear a girl called "willow," we are reminded of a certain round-shouldered tree that stands with its feet in a mudhole, and can't see where the compliment comes in.

## GOOD Short Stories

The other day a Senator, who had been engaged in a sharp tilt with a colleague, as he met a Senate employe, asked: "Well, do you think that I made a fool of myself?" "Senator," was the reply, "if I said that you made a fool of yourself, I would be disrespectful. If I said you did not, I would be saying what is not true."

According to the Pall Mall Gazette, Gaudersheim, a German village, has recently been en fete. The occasion was the honoring of a hen which had laid its thousandth egg. Many of the houses were decorated with flags, while in the evening the proprietor of the hen entertained his friends at a supper at which the principal dish was a gigantic omelet. The function was a splendid success.

A detachment of British soldiers recently visited a deserted Boer farm. In the sitting-room they found a piano, to which a pathetic note was attached, entreating them not to smash it, as it was a present from somebody's dear mother, and consequently a souvenir which was much valued. The hard-hearted yeomen, of course, promptly proceeded to search it, and found it crammed with gunpowder and caps.

It is said that Bishop Walker, now Bishop of Western New York, attained more fame on account of his "cathedral car," as it struck the imagination of people in the East and in England, than was warranted by any religious results gained from it. The car laid idle for some years at Carrington, N. D., and recently has been purchased by a clothing firm, having been remodeled for that purpose. When Bishop Walker went to London, he was always introduced as "the bishop of the cathedral car," and he was never known to resent it. At a dinner in England he sat near Lord Roseberry, then prime minister, who turned to him with this apt motto: "Well, my dear Bishop, your idea is certainly a new one. I had heard of the church militant, and the church triumphant, but I had never heard of the church ambulant."

It is said that Lord Charles Beresford, on first entering the House of Commons a very young man, in 1838, was inexpressibly addicted to playing pranks of all kinds. One old member, who suffered from gout, used to retire to one of the back benches under the reporters' gallery, behind the speaker's chair, and taking off his boots, sleep soundly until awakened by the ringing of the bells which precedes a division. One night the old gentleman, on being aroused from his slumbers by a division, hastily put on one boot, but no trace of the other could be found. It had disappeared in some mysterious fashion. The whips found him under the bench, distractedly searching for the boot, and by force bundled him into the lobby, with one boot off and the other boot on, amid rounds of good-natural laughter. Later on the missing boot was "accidentally" discovered by Lord Charles Beresford under his own particular seat.

### NEVER SEEN BY PLEBEIANS.

Poverty Keeps High Society People in France from the Public View.

Few foreigners who visit France ever obtain even a passing glimpse of the real aristocracy of the country. This is the avowal of Hugues Le Roux, who is now on a visit to this country, made to the students of Columbia College recently. "These people of the genuine aristocracy," he said, "are in financial poverty because of the industrial expansion of the times, which has destroyed their former means of support. They are inaccessible to foreigners because real French society is sensitive to its lack of funds and realizes its inability to entertain foreign guests in the style to which they have been accustomed. Visitors to Paris meet the 'bourgeois' and the cosmopolitan people who come there from all countries but France, and they believe this represents real French society."

"It is impossible," said M. Le Roux at the start of his address, "to judge fairly of French society to-day; it is too complex. It was possible to do so, however, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when there was a common ideal of living and loving. For society at that time the example was set by the court, and society was its own object. Since the days of the revolution this state of affairs has vanished. France is in a process of perpetual change and is in a state of evolution. What the result will be cannot be foretold. The middle class people of the present day are following the ideals of the seventeenth century aristocracy. They try to set the pace, and it is thus the stability of modern French society is shaken. It is difficult for foreigners to meet the representatives of real French society to-day, as they keep to themselves."

"The great mistake of the foreign world to-day is that it judges French society by the conception of it given in the novels of modern French novelists, especially in those of Paul Bourget and Guy De Maupassant. These two novelists not only fail to describe the true characteristics of French society, but they describe social conditions as found nowhere on the globe. They take individual psychological cases and special instances for their delineation of character that foreign readers naturally suppose representative of France, but in reality are typical either of some other other country

or of cosmopolitan life in Paris, which is not real French life.

"I have in mind a case where both Bourget and De Maupassant took for the subject of their novels a certain notorious woman of Paris, who finally died in an insane asylum. Though this woman was of a foreign country, the novelists labelled her with a French name and the natural impression got abroad that she was typical of French life."

### WAR PAINT OF BATTLESHIPS.

Confusion of Gunners' Sight the Important Thing to Be Sought.

A question of the best color of "war paint" for a man-of-war is now being discussed by naval experts. For a long time neutral tints have been the favorite for painting a ship for active war service. The United States, as is well known, painted its ships a dull slate color before sending them to fight the Spaniards. The British have been using a khaki-colored paint, but it is believed that this tint is easily "ranged." In fact, khaki has been found anything but a safe color for either ships or men. The Boers declare that they can "spot" khaki at a great distance, though when the color was first adopted it was thought to have the quality of comparative invisibility.

A color now highly commended for the uniforms of soldiers or for the war paint of ships is gray-green. Green is said to confuse the eye of a sharpshooter more than any other color and has the same effect upon the eye of a ship's gunner. The British admiralty is now making extensive experiments in the painting of warships and there is now a large party of experts who favor obtrusive color schemes. This is harking back a century at least for Nelson favored the painting of warships in black and white checks, as such a pattern, he declared, confused the gunners of the enemy and prevented accurate aim. The advocates of bright color schemes take the same ground as Nelson; that invisibility is out of the question with ships and the only thing sought after in painting a man-of-war should be to create confusion of aim.

It has often been said that red was a deadly color, says the New York Mail and Express, which would never be worn by troops in battle again. Now, however, red has found many advocates, for, while the color has great visibility, yet it is also possessed of valuable deceptive qualities. To judge distances accurately with the objective point one of bright scarlet or red is almost impossible. As accurate range is everything in modern warfare, red is coming into favor again.

### A BAD HALF-HOUR.

Meeting of Foamer Lovers on Their Wedding Tour.

She is very pretty, and no one wonders that her husband is much in love with her unto this day, but she tells this story of a bad half hour on her wedding journey:

"I was 18," she said, "when I was married, and had been engaged to my husband a year, but preceding both engagement and marriage I was sort of engaged, school girl fashion, to another young fellow. It was one of those intangible engagements that melt into thin air when the real prince comes, but fervid enough while they last. In this case my interest in the affair cooled with the rapidity of a collapsing balloon, and, as the youth lived in a distant city, no embarrassing explanations were necessary.

"So I was married, and the wedding journey included a stop of several days in a town on the Ohio river, where we had a cozy table all to ourselves at the hotel. It was at dinner one day that the patriarchal waiter approached and asked if we would object to another gentleman and lady being placed at our table.

"Bride like yourself, missy," he added confidentially as he passed my chair. In a moment he ushered to their places the other couple, and I looked up to encounter my former fiancé, consternation and amazement written on every line of his face. Lacking the wit or wisdom of experienced years, I dropped my eyes without further recognition than rapid paling and bushing of countenance, and he, following my lead, began discussing the menu with his wife.

"The dinner proceeded in such appalling silence, so far as I was concerned, as to fairly paralyze my husband, and explanations were in order as soon as we returned to our apartments. Then how he laughed and went in search of the rival couple, only to find they had left the hotel immediately after the meal, and we have never heard of them since."—Baltimore Sun.

### Identifying the Species.

Lord Justice Mathew is a man of such mild and kindly exterior, with such gentle voice and manner, that he gives the impression of being a simple kindly layman rather than an expert and profound lawyer. This was evidently the idea of a professional seller of painted birds who some years ago met him in the neighborhood of the Law Courts, and exhibiting one of his birds, asked him if he could tell to what species it belonged. The judge stopped, examined the bird with great care, pretended to admire the gaudy plumage, examined it again, and then remarked: "I do not think I have ever seen a bird exactly like this, but, judging from the old proverb that 'Birds of a feather flock together,' I should say it was a jallbird!"

Many a man leads an honest life because he doesn't resign the idea of wearing clothes with stripes running the wrong way.

### FEUD IS STILL ON.

Why the Mountaineer Wouldn't Extend the Olive Branch.

"I had been told long enough before I got to Joe Davis' cabin that he had had a feud with the Harpers for the past fifteen years, and that at least a couple of lives had been sacrificed," said a Detroit man who makes periodical trips in the mountain district of the South. "I kept clear of the subject until we got our pipes out after supper, and then I approached it cautiously. I did not find him at all reticent, however."

"Yes, I have been fussin' with the Harpers for a long time now," he calmly replied.

"How did it begin?" I asked.

"Tradin' mews, I reckon."

"Isn't that a pretty small thing to quarrel over for fifteen years?"

"Yes, it sorter looks that way, but Harper killed my brother Dan, you know."

"And some one killed his brother Sam."

"Deed they did. Had to do it to even up, you know."

"Well, why not let that end it? I persisted. 'If you say you'll quit I'll go and see Harper and see if he won't do the same.'"

"I'll think it over," he slowly answered, and the subject was dropped.

"I was given a shakedown on the floor when bedtime came," continued the narrator, according to the Detroit Free Press, "and when it was supposed that I was asleep the cabiner said to his wife:

"'Would you make it up with the Harpers, Linda?'

"'Reckon not,' she replied.

"'For what?'

"'Because, if you do his Jim will want to marry our Mary, and our Jane will want to marry his Tom, and we'll get so tangled up that the only way you'll hev will be rollin' down hill on a log.'"

"Next morning the man said he'd thought the whole matter over carefully and had come to the conclusion that mixing things up might be dangerous, and he would accompany me for half a mile on my journey in hopes to get a shot at a Harper and keep matters straight."

### GOV. HOGG'S NEW WAITER.

Why the Old Servant Gave Way to a Second One.

At Beaumont lately the waiter who served former Governor Hogg of Texas was one George, a sabbie-skinned gentleman of numerous accomplishments. George is a model waiter. Each day at dinner George would receive from the Governor his tip, \$1. George revelled in wealth. He was the envied of all the other waiters. He was the happy possessor of a "good thing."

The other day when the Governor entered the dining-room a strange waiter stood behind his chair.

"Where's George?" asked the Governor brusquely.

The new waiter bowed low. "Ise youah waitah now, sah," he said softly.

"But where's George?" again asked the Governor.

Again his new retainer assured him "