

Select Literature.

GRACE WELDON.

FREDERICA, THE BONNET-GIRL. CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

'Do you love any one?' he asked, with a quick, keen glance at her as quickly changing face.

'No—that is—no—I do not say that I—' 'You have seen some one, then, who has interested your feelings,' he said, with stern suspicion, his brow darkening.

'That faint "no" is not a strong enough negative. Who is this that stands between me and my hopes and desires?' he cried, pressing his hand upon her shoulder, and looking as if he would read her soul.

'It is one of thy own accursed and bondage-loving blood?' 'No, brother,' she responded with an eye that flashed resentment at the thought.

'Then, 'tis worse! for no one of thy race might wed thee; but if thou hast placed thy love on one of the race of those who are our natural foes, thou art loving one who, knowing it, will think only of making thee his slave! Speak! Who hast thou dated to fix thy thoughts upon?' 'I know him not; yet I love him, Philip,' she answered firmly. 'I have but thrice spoken to him, or he to me, and then only a passing word.'

'His name?' 'I am ignorant of it.' 'When saw you this person first?' 'Two weeks ago.'

'At Madam Anson's! Fool that I have been to risk so much. It never entered my mind that thou mightest be caught in the net I set for others! What said he? What was his rank—his appearance?' 'A young gentleman, with a fine countenance, and an air manly and noble!'

'Thou hast his picture, like a true ver, at thy finger's end. I see my folly! Had he dark hair and eyes?' he asked, quickly. 'Was he tall, with a dark complexion, and very richly dressed, in the extreme of fashion?' 'No. His hair was fair-brown, and his eyes a mild and expressive blue. His complexion was very beautiful and clear, with the cheeks slightly red, and colored deeply by the least emotion. His dress was plain, but very gentlemanly!'

'It was not he, as I hoped,' said the mulatto, in a tone of disappointment. 'When saw you this person first?' 'Two weeks since.' 'Where?' 'In this manner,' she said, coloring. 'I was seated at the open window at work sewing, when the wind took my muslin scarf from my neck, and bore it out, and carried it through the air quite across the crowded street. It fell fluttering at the feet of a young gentleman—'

'This same one?' he quickly interrupted Philip. 'Yes. He was just coming out of the bonnet-store opposite. He took it up, and seeing me at the window looking anxiously after it, he crossed the street, and as the door was open, he entered, and handed it to me, with a smile, and some pleasant words upon the accident.'

'What were the words?' 'I have no recollection of them. I only know the tones of his voice were very agreeable, and lingered long after he had gone.' 'Fool that I have been! Did he leave then?' 'Yes, directly, and passed on.'

'And you were so foolish as to suffer his image, from this little act, to dwell in your thoughts.' 'I could not help it. Nor did I then suppose there was harm.'

'Grest, and I fear, irremediable harm! But I may blame myself. When again did you see him?' 'The next day after, but one, standing at the window in the upper show-room of the house over the bonnet-maker's.'

'Did he bow?' 'No.' 'Did he regard you closely?' 'No.' 'And this you call a meeting?' 'It seemed like one to me!'

'It did!' he responded, with a peculiar intonation. 'Now, the third meeting?' 'It was three evenings ago, just at twilight. Madam Anson desired me to cross the street, to purchase a ribbon at the bonnet-store, and just as I was opening the door to enter, he was opening it to pass out. On seeing me he smiled, bowed, and said, "Are you chasing another muslin scarf, miss?"'

'And what reply made you?' 'I do not recollect that I made any. I was surprised and confused. He directly passed out without saying anything further.'

'And you have not seen this gentleman since?' 'No.' 'And you confess that on these three occasions he had such a mysterious power as to win your heart? This is absurd! It is a freak of fancy, and you must think of him no more, unless, indeed, he prove to be my man; but that, from your description, is impossible. You, think you love Isabel, he continued, in a kinder tone, 'where your imagination has only been entertaining itself. In a few days you will quite forget this person, whom I should exceedingly like to find out. I ought to be angry; but I will treat the matter as lightly as it deserves. I am gratified that he seems not to have discovered your partiality for him; else it would lead to worse still. But I have all confidence in your discretion.'

'You may have, brother,' she answered proudly and firmly, 'ready to cooperate with me in reference to the person I spoke of?' 'I can never give my hand to one, while another has my heart!'

'Are you mad?' 'I will wed this youth, would he wed me, and none other!' she answered, with a positiveness that surprised him.

'He was silent for a few moments, and suppressed, with an effort, his deep frowns and disappointment. 'If you persist in this determination, I will soon correct this fancy of yours. The young man you love shall die by my hand, ere I am defeated in my long-cherished purpose.'

'If he dies a violent death, I shall know then on whom to avenge him,' she answered, with a flashing glance. 'Philip well knew the spirit of the young girl before him, and that when awakened, it was more terrible than his own. He, therefore, concealed his emotions, and said, mildly, 'Nay, I will not harm him. I will, however, go about to find who he is.'

'Beware, lest he come to harm, brother,' she said, a very determined and quiet tone of voice, 'I would know who he is.'

'And if he prove well, why not let him take the place of this stranger, whom I know not! I pledge myself to you, soul and body, that if you give me leave to cast my net about this noble youth, who has already ensnared my affections, I will win him, for I shall leave no means untried; for my success will be involved in my happiness!'

Philip stood a moment in deep thought. Gradually the cloud passed from his brow, and then he said, with a look less bitter, 'I will think of this. To-morrow I will give you my decision. To bed now, for it is three hours past midnight!' He gave her a light, conducted her to the door of an inner room, bade her 'good-night,' and turning the key, went slowly to his own chamber.

CHAPTER XII. THE TWO MAIDENS.

WE now return to Frederica. It will be remembered that she had promised James Daily to comply with his request, and, in person, take home the bonnet, which she had, unknowingly, made and trimmed for Grace, and also be the bearer of a note from him to Mr. Weldon, excusing his absence from the counting-room, on account of indisposition; the nature of which indisposition, he did not, however, explain in his note.

It was about nine o'clock, the morning following that eventful night in which all the events and incidents related in the foregoing eleven chapters took place, that Miss Weldon was standing in the drawing-room window of her father's stately mansion on Summer street, gazing forth without any definite object before her eyes. She was clad very simply, in a white morning dress, that finely displayed her noble figure. Her soft brown hair was laid plainly back from her brow, and bound in a rich knot of shining braids low in her neck. She was paler than usual, and there was an expression of anxious thought upon her countenance, for she had not yet ceased to think of her encounter with the burglar the evening before, which, though at the time she carried boldly through, yet now made her tremble even at the recollection of her danger. The house, too, was in some confusion, which would account for her anxiety of look; two officers having just left it, after she had given to them, in her father's presence, a description of the burglar's appearance.

You have deserved all the praise the officer bestowed on your courage and self-possession, Grace, said Mr. Weldon, entering with a paper in his hand, from the rear room, and advancing towards her with a parental smile of approbation. 'I felt that presence of mind alone would avail me, his appearance was so murderous. I have not slept for dreaming of him!'

'If you had not chanced to have seen him, it might have been impossible to recover the plate; but your description of him, both last night after you alarmed us by entering the parlor and making known the robbery, thus giving me an opportunity of sending to the Police, and to the officers that left just now, will doubtless enable me to recover it; for they say they know who the man is from your description, as surely as if they had also seen him take it!'

'I am glad I have been of service, father; but I confess, she added, smiling, 'that I should rather not have met him. But I will banish the matter from my thoughts.'

'That is the best way. Here is an advertisement I have penned, offering a reward of fifty dollars for the recovery of the plate! I shall send it to the newspaper after I go to the counting-room. You are still looking very sad and restless! Are you not well, child? I fear this adventure has affected your nerves.'

'No sir. I am quite well.' 'I am glad you are. You must not dwell upon it, for you are not wont to be a weak-hearted girl! But good by, my child! I hope to find you in better spirits at dinner!'

The merchant affectionately kissed the forehead of his lovely daughter, and left the room. Grace was by no means weak-hearted. Her sadness did not altogether proceed from nervousness. She had looked from the window after the burglar had sprung out, when she saw, on the opposite side of the street, a person she believed to be James. She saw him pursue the man, and listening, heard, a few moments afterwards, as she thought, the sound of a far distant struggle. She had expected James that night to serenade her, and converse awhile with her through the trellised leaf-drapery of the window, as he had often done before, not clandestinely, to conceal their interview, but because it was pleasant thus to talk with each other, the lover remaining outside leaning upon the window, the maiden within, bending her ear to listen to his low tones of love and fealty. He had not made his appearance after she had thought she discovered him, and therefore she was now tortured with anxiety lest some evil had befallen him, if he had striven to stay the burglar's retreat. A dozen times she had it upon her lips during the morning, to tell her father the true cause of her anxiety; but the natural reserve of a young girl to confess even to a father, her interest in a lover, restrained her. In going to the counting-room he usually passed the house, and half an hour earlier than now; but she had been at the window, save when called away a few minutes to speak with the officers, when she left a little sister watching, for more than that time, and yet had not seen him pass.

'It is foolish, I know, to feel so; and I dare say I am nervous; but I am persuaded that James would have returned and informed us of what he had seen, unless he had been overpowered; for that a struggle took place between some persons soon after they went down the place, I am convinced! and that it was James I saw I am sure; for otherwise he would have been here! This suspense is painful!—If I knew where his mother lived, I would go there and inquire for him.'

Grace did not know that the shop she entered, and where she spoke for a hat, was kept by his mother; indeed she did not ask the name, but pleased with the beauty and taste of Frederica, and with the hats which she had made, she engaged her to make one for her. It is doubtful if Miss Weldon knew that James's mother kept a milliner's shop, though she was quite well aware she was in humble life, and followed some respectable pursuit. People in large cities do not know about each other's affairs as in small towns. Grace had never asked him, perhaps from a feeling of delicacy, what was her mode of living, and he had never spoken to her of his mother, save to say that he loved her very tenderly, and meant some day Grace should see her and know her. He had also spoken of a young friend he wished she should know, meaning Frederica. Miss Weldon had, moreover, it will be remembered, been absent at Troy for the most part of her girlhood, and it was only during the past two or three months that the intimacy formed in the innocence and faith of childhood, between her and James, had been renewed under the banner of young Cupid. She had been out but little since her return, and therefore it is not surprising she should be a stranger to circumstances which at first sight

it would seem surprising, that she was not familiar with. This explains, also, her not having known Frederica, and why her face to the latter, was that of a total stranger.

Grace had hardly finished speaking, when her eyes were attracted by a young girl of exquisite symmetry of figure, which a small shawl did not hide, a green veil over her face, and carrying in her hand a hand-box, who with a hesitating step seemed to be examining the house. Grace thought the form familiar to her and was trying to recollect where she had seen it, when the young person put aside her veil, and looked earnestly at the name on the door, for as there was a wide portico intervening, the plate was several feet distant, and the letters upon it small. She stepped nigher and nigher, as she tried to make it out, and yet without having noticed Grace at the window, who had instantly recognized the sweet countenance of the bonnet-girl, and was now observing her with interested attention.

(To be continued.)



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