

Her Husband's Widow

By EDMUND B. D'AUVERGNE

A Thrilling Serial of the Romantic Adventures of a Young and Beautiful Bride Caught in a Labyrinth of Amazing Intrigue.

CHAPTER I.

Leslie Morné closed the door softly behind her and with a sigh of relief walked swiftly toward the sea. The night was dark, chilly and moonlit. The esplanade lay broad, clean and silent in the quivering glare of the big electric lamps. The hotel windows showed a cosy glow but there were very few people in sight.

It was near the end of the season and there was nothing to tempt the residents abroad. A fierce gust of wind caught the girl as she emerged on to the front, wrapping her neat costume tightly around her slight figure and blowing the ends of her velvet stole in long streamers behind her.

What a relief to be alone at last!—free from the rudeness, the roughness, the endless fuss and bother of her three charges. Her nerves were on edge. Twice that day she burst into weak, angry tears, to the immense amusement of the eldest boy.

A broad path of moonlight revealed the heaving and tossing of the waves. It seemed to Leslie Morné a golden stairway leading right up to the moon. She had often been told that she was always crying for the moon, but her thoughts tonight were of strictly terrestrial things. The wind was coming across the sea.

She wondered whether it had been caressing the cheeks of French women an hour before. It was a messenger from the distance, from world's strange, joyous, tragic, perhaps, but different from that which she knew. The lights of a steamer were moving swiftly along the horizon. Perhaps it was one of those great liners bound for New York, the city of millionaires. There were doubtless rich, handsome men aboard—men whose word was enough to raise you to dazzling opulence and pride of place, with them would be their women, beautiful women, queenly, thoroughbred, in wonderful isles ablaze with gems. They were like floating palaces, those ships—they had balls and concerts aboard them—

She Hears the Voice of the Sea Calling.

The sea and the wind—they were as restless as she and always calling to her. "Come out, come out, and wander with us round the world."

With unpleasant abruptness her thoughts turned to the three children sleeping (she hoped) peacefully in the lodging house. She believed she could love children—fine, delicately nurtured children, not like these. She liked the little girl, it was true, but she hated her brothers; no doubt she would grow up as heartless and common as they. No she would not be sorry when their mother came down to relieve her.

Two men unknown to her and to each other were watching her with interest from the sheltered seats on either side. As she turned from the wind the radiance of the arc lamps fell full upon her. It showed the anxious, wistful look on her white face; it revealed her scarlet lips, so vivid in contrast, and shone upon her dull red hair.

Her serge costume, brought in at the waist by a patent leather girdle, fitted closely to a girlish frame which gave promise of rare grace in maturity. With her plumed hat and low-cut patent shoes she made a somewhat incongruous figure at such a place and hour. She shivered as a gust sprinkled her with salt spray, and gave another turn to the stole about her neck.

With his evening dress and unbuttoned dust-colored coat, gave him a slightly rakish air. He smiled at her fixedly and leant back against the railings. The color mounted to her face, and her first impulse was to go away. He saw this. "Don't get wild," he entreated her with a note of eagerness and apology. "I really didn't mean any of

fence. I wanted to speak to you awfully." She told him that she didn't like him. After all, by his dress he appeared to be a gentleman. "What are you doing out at this time of night?" he asked, with an assumption of intimate familiarity. Suddenly she became aware that he was staring at her in an insulting way. She stopped short.

"I wish you would go away," she said.

"Why?"

"Because I don't like you." The words slipped out before she knew that she had framed them.

He stuck a cigar in his mouth and

grinned at her. "Suppose I don't go?" he said. She stared at him, only half comprehending. "Will you go away?" she repeated desperately, raising her voice.

"No, I won't, just to punish you." The other man had come up behind them and had overheard her imperative cry. Their eyes met, and he saw the appeal in hers.

"Hullo! What's the row?" he inquired, in a laughing, good-humored tone as he halted beside them.

"What's that got to do with you?" angrily retorted the man in evening dress.

"Please make this man go away!" said Leslie, retreating backwards.

The man with the insignificant features collected himself apparently for a tremendous effort, whether of courage or sarcasm will never be known, for it exhausted itself merely in a snort. He stalked away with a comically exaggerated air of dignity.

"Thank you very much," said Leslie, trembling a little. "He frightened me, rather."

They stood looking at each other very awkwardly. It dawned on her that he was the handsomest man she had ever seen. He was about three-and-twenty, and a lithe, supple frame denoting perfect physical training. His features were cut in classic mould, and but for the small, close-cropped moustache above his smiling lips his face might well have served for the portrait of some victor of the Olympic games.

"Well, I'm glad to have come along when I did," he said in a loud, musical voice. "I dare say the poor beggar feels a bit sore at being told off like that. I suppose you think I ought not to go on talking to you, either?"

"No, I don't!" cried Leslie, making a step toward him. "I don't know what I should have done but for you. It was very brave of you. He might have fought!"

They looked after the retreating figure and they both laughed. Then the girl's eyes turned again to her deliverer. She realized abruptly that here, after all, was one of those romantic adventures of which her reading had been so full. She thrilled with pleasure and admiration. She liked this stranger's frank manners, his loose gray suit. She wondered if he wasn't a squire's son; perhaps a hard-riding, devil-may-care baronet. There had been such men not far from the east coast village where she had been reared.

He walked beside her along the deserted, wind-swept promenade. She had had no training for any sort of calling; she was difficult to classify socially or economically. She had simply grown up in an East Anglian village in the custody of an aunt who let apartments in the summer and subsisted for the rest of the year on the proceeds of that industry and a tiny annuity. Leslie understood that she was the daughter of this austere person's sister and that her parents had died when she was a baby leaving her totally unprovided for. Very early she had understood that her parents were not to be talked about and that in some vague way she was different from other children.

She was especially attracted by ro-

manes of which she could imagine herself the heroine.

She held the people among whom she lived in aversion. She was not naturally a snob. Once she heard herself referred to by the grocer's wife as "that nameless chit who puts on such airs." It was because she was not common like them, she told herself, that they hated her.

This prejudice was immensely fortified by an episode in her fifteenth year. Wandering, book in hand, on the links near Cromer, she was struck and well-nigh stunned by a golf ball. She recovered consciousness to find herself surrounded by a group of the red-coated "goblins" who had obsessed her childish imagination. The player responsible for the accident, a fine, military-looking man, carried her in his arms to the big hotel close by, stood by while a doctor examined the abrasion and then—oh, the pride and glory of it—took her back to her cottage before the eyes of all her neighbors in his own car.

She saved enough money to procure a certain amount of instruction in music at Cromer. This and her undiminished absorption in books led to frequent and violent quarrels with her aunt. When she was seventeen her tear stained face excited the sympathy of a summer boarder, a London woman sorely worried by the cares of a young family. Her offer of a situation at least promised escape from Norfolk and a chance of seeing the great world. Besides, in many of the novels Leslie had read companions and governesses ended by marrying their employers' distinguished visitors. She turned her back on the Norfolk village with a sigh of relief.

A month later she realized that Mrs. Richards had not, and was never likely to have, any distinguished visitors, and that in the London suburb she was no higher up the social ladder than at Leffingham. Moreover, the drudgery was worse and her time for reading much more limited. Mrs. Richards was not an unkind woman, as her intervention had shown, but, as she often declared, "Miss Morné would not let anybody like her."

And so, restless and desperately unhappy, she reached her nineteenth year.

[To Be Continued Tomorrow.]

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"Please Make Him Go Away," Said Leslie.

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