

THE MAIL

A PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE.

TERRE HAUTE, - MARCH 31, 1883

UNDER THE CHIN.

Trying her bonnet under her chin
She tied her raven ringlets in,
But not alone in the silken snare
Did she catch her lovely floating hair,
For tying her bonnet under her chin
She tied a young man heart within.

—Nora Perry.

And many a time that little chin
He's heard from since, you bet and win!
And bonnets she's had for her wavy hair,
And many a time he's been called a bear;
And now she is throwing her ringlets back,
And says she shall have a sequel in sack.

—(Courier Journal.)

Buttoning the sashkin up to her chin,
She glideth out and she glideth in,
And the eyes of women with envy are green;
But the first young fellow is seldom seen,
For in a dark office he labors like sin,
For the fairy who tied and roped him in.

—(Chicago World.)

Trying her bonnet under her chin
Is not where the harm to that youth comes in,
Nor an office dark; but a big airy hall,
With green covered table and cue and ball—
Some friends, a supper, and a little gin—
There's where the harm to the youth comes in.

If a man can enjoy the good things of life,
Why should he growl at the wants of his wife,
And fume and scold, and tear and roar,
And lay all the blame of the world at her door?
And why should the fairy have roped him in,
By tying her bonnet under her chin?

—(One of the Girls.)

IRMA DOWEL;

OR THE

Wronged Wife's Vow.

BY MORRIS REDWING.

Author of "Blind Nell," "Beggars Prince,"
"Joella," "Silver Dagger," Etc.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE IN THE WILDERNESS.

It was the 13th of June, one of the pleasantest of the usually pleasant days that month contains.

The 13th of June and Irma Dowel's birthday, her wedding day, the happiest day of her whole life.

"I am sixteen to-day," said Irma, as she stood before the glass in her low-ceiled bedroom, coiling her long, wavy, black hair over her plump, brown fingers.

"Sixteen and a woman," mused the little beauty, a soft, lustrous love-light beaming from her liquid black eyes. "It seems like a dream, the past month of my life. How strange that poor, little, ignorant me should attract such a grand, brave, generous man as Noel. Noel! How sweet the name. I have known him scarcely a month, yet—yet I love him so much. It seems as though I had known him all my life, and now my life and love is to be blended with his. Oh, I am so happy!"

The girl had fastened her midnight hair in a heavy coil at the back of her regular head, and stood regarding the picture with clasped hands and half-open lips, revealing a wall of pearl beyond their portals.

Irma Dowel was wondrously beautiful. Even she had looked to the fact under the flattering tongue of Noel Nelworne, who had come from the great, busy, outside world only a month before, into the quiet forest life of Irma Dowel, the squatter's darling niece, the only stay and comfort of a widowed mother's heart.

Only sixteen, unused to the ways of a wicked world, with a nature as free from guile as a dove, little gipsy-faced Irma had been overwhelmed with surprise and gratitude at the friendly notice of this splendid city fellow. He praised her eyes, her hair, her faultless form, and flattered her trusting heart until her grateful feeling merged finally into the deeper feeling of love.

"Nowhere in the wide world have I met your equal, my precious forest bird," said Nelworne, in his soft, thrilling accent, that lulled the maiden's senses and bent her weak nature to his will.

While Irma stood motionless before the glass a step sounded without, and the next moment the door was opened softly.

A woman's face was reflected in the glass.

The girl turned to meet the anxious gaze of her mother. Mrs. Dowel was taller than her daughter, and at one time had possessed all the remarkable beauty that was prominent in her child.

There was a tired, weary expression resting on the face of Mrs. Dowel, a sad longing, touching the inner depths of her black, mournful eyes.

"Irma, my child, what are you doing? Dawdling your time away before the glass. I was once as simple and trustful as you are now, and learned only by bitter experience the cruel nature of the world, the treachery and deceit of man."

The forest girl opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"What are you croaking about now, mother?" she said lightly. "I thought you approved of my choice. I thought you were proud of the grand, noble man who has condescended to make me his wife."

"Condescended to make you his wife?" with a bitter laugh. "Irma, no man should stoop to win a woman. If Noel Nelworne has made you believe that he is coming down from—"

"No, no mother," cried Irma, quickly. "Noel has never intimated such a thing. He thinks I am a queen among women. He loves me to infatuation; but I know how he has stooped from his high position and raised me to his level."

"We are poor, mother, wretchedly poor. Noel knows it. He is rich, the pride of the circle in which he moves. For such a one to come to a poor forest girl and make her his wife and place her in a home of luxury speaks well for his generous heart."

Mrs. Dowel sank into a seat and brushed a stray tear from her eye. Somehow a strange foreboding of coming evil oppressed her.

"I am afraid you are deceiving yourself, Irma."

The young girl's face grew troubled. She went over and laid a soft, brown hand on the gray head of her mother.

"Mother, why have you said nothing of this before? Why have you allowed me to go on basking in the sunshine of the greatest happiness of my life, never uttering a word of remonstrance until it is too late, until I am bound hand and foot in the chains of love? It is too late now to influence me. Once, before I learned to love Noel, you might have interfered and prevented this marriage; now I shall die if Noel is driven from me."

There was a deep earnestness in the maiden's voice as she spoke, her little form trembling visibly under the influence of powerful emotion.

"It is indeed too late," murmured Mrs. Dowel. "You will marry this man and

go from us forever. In your new home you will forget your humble friends; even your mother will no longer hold a place in your affections."

"Mother, never speak like that again. You know me better," and Irma bent, with tear-wet eyes, and kissed her aged parent fondly. "While life lasts you are the dearest of earthly friends. When I am once settled, my homes shall be yours, and you shall bid farewell to this lowly cabin forever. Do you doubt me? Have I not been a dutiful child in the past?"

"Indeed you have, Irma," murmured Mrs. Dowel. "I will say nothing more to cloud your wedding day, Irma. Do you think your cousin Gerald will be here?"

"Ralph promised to return inside of six weeks. To-day is the date set for his return," answered the girl, a sudden tinge of red dying her olive cheeks.

"If he does not come?"

"The marriage will take place all the same. In fact, I think it would be as well that Ralph was not present."

"Irma!"

"I understand what you would say, mother," returned the maiden, quickly, "but Ralph knows nothing of Noel. Explanations would be disagreeable."

"I had once hoped that you and Ralph—"

"I understand. Ralph is but a boy, and that little love story he once whispered was forgotten even before Noel came. Ralph will feel the better for not being present. I hope he will not return until after I am gone."

"Perhaps it is best so," returned, Mrs. Dowel, with a deep-drawn sigh. "Voices were now heard outside the cabin."

"There's Noel now!" exclaimed Irma, springing to the low window and peering out.

In the front yard she saw three men. The tall, gray-bearded, middle-aged man ahead she knew to be her uncle, Hiram Dowel. One of the others was easily recognized by his tall form, rich dress and aristocratic bearing. The third man, a small, weazen-faced individual, with black hair and eyes, carried a small book under his arm and strode along with a pompous air.

He was the justice whom Nelworne had employed to perform the ceremony of marriage.

With a fluttering heart Irma turned from the window.

"Oh, mother, they've come."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Noel, uncle, and the—justice," a slight blush mantling her cheeks as she uttered the words.

The wedding was to be a quiet affair. The Dowels had no near neighbors, and as Nelworne had decided on having no regular wedding, his will was law with the residents of the forest cabin.

We shall not attempt to describe the affair that came off in the front room of the squatter's cabin. Suffice it to say that the ceremony was very brief, and that an hour after Irma's interview with her mother she was the wife of Noel Nelworne.

The month of Nelworne's sojourn in the woods had been a month of unalloyed happiness to Irma Dowel.

Now the fruition of all her dreams was attained. She was the wife of the grand, noble man whom she looked up to with a feeling akin to reverence.

He was the king among men.

If she once thought of her boyish cousin Ralph, it was only to think of him as a friend.

Ralph and Irma had been warm friends for years.

Deep down in the heart of Ralph Gerard there lurked a tender feeling, a feeling that grew apace as his dark-eyed, bewitching cousin grew to womanhood.

Even now, on Irma Dowel's wedding day, Ralph Gerard was speeding across the State toward the home of his charming cousin, little suspecting what had occurred during his six weeks' absence.

Three days of the purest happiness Irma Dowel had ever experienced.

Out under the spreading branches of the forest trees that shaded the waters of a babbling brook the married lovers wandered on the afternoon of the third day after the marriage.

"I am so happy now," murmured the blushing, sixteen-year-old bride, as she leaned confidently on her husband's arm, looking up into his dark, handsome face trustfully.

He smiled, a queer look entering his brown eyes.

"I hope nothing will ever come to mar your happiness, my pet," he said, softly, bending down and kissing her cheek tenderly.

"Nothing can come, Noel," she returned. "I have your love and I am content."

"Thanks, my pet. Are you not anxious to go to your city home?"

"No. Where you are I am happy. Whenever you will, then I am ready to go," she returned, softly.

Just then a step sounded on the forest leaves.

A shadow darkened the waters of the brook.

Irma uttered a little, startled cry, as she met the rebuking gaze of a pair of blue eyes.

A youth of twenty, neatly yet plainly clad, carrying a small traveling-bag in hand, stood before them.

"Cousin Ralph!" exclaimed Irma.

"Ay, it's your Cousin Ralph," retorted the youth, rather bluntly.

"Whom have we here, holding such friendly intercourse with you, Irma?"

The maiden blushed and trembled, then turning to her cousin, said:

"This is Mr. Nelworne, my husband. I hope you will be friends."

CHAPTER II.

A VILLAIN SHADOWED.

"Your husband!"

The words fell in a startled exclamation from the lips of Ralph Gerard, a look of pained amazement revealed on his face.

Noel Nelworne bowed and offered his hand.

"What cruel play is this, Irma?" said Gerard, rather curiously. "I don't see anything in the fact that she is my wife to call for such rudeness from you. I judge you are one of her low relations, whom she will have the good sense to shun in the future."

Irma shrank from her cousin trembling like a leaf, unable to utter a word.

A frown mantled the brows of Nelworne.

"A lady has spoken, the truth, sir," he said, rather curiously. "I don't see anything in the fact that she is my wife to call for such rudeness from you. I judge you are one of her low relations, whom she will have the good sense to shun in the future."

"It is true."

"And you are this man's wife! In mercy's name, Irma, what have you done?"

Nelworne advanced angrily in front of his shrinking wife.

"That will do, sir," he said, sternly. "I will not allow you to insult my wife. You will please me by departing at once."

Ralph Gerard turned toward the speaker, a threatening look in his blue eyes.

"You are her husband," he muttered through close shut teeth. "Your relationship only saves you from the chastisement you richly merit;" then turning to Irma once more:

"Irma, Cousin Irma, this news is a terrible shock to me. I can't reconcile myself to believe that you have madly thrown yourself away on this man. Had I known what was going on during my absence I should have hastened back weeks ago. Heaven grant that you may never live to repent this mad freak."

Ralph Gerard turned on his heel and walked rapidly away in the direction of the house.

"And that impudent fellow is your cousin, Irma?"

"He is my cousin," she returned, her face white to the lips, "but I do not think he meant to be impudent."

"Perhaps not. You will have nothing to do with such low people when we are once settled in our city home."

The tone was anything but pleasant.

Irma grew pale, a sudden pain clutching her sensitive heart.

"Oh, Noel, you can not mean that I am to ignore the friends of my childhood. Cousin Ralph—"

I mean that when you go to Cincinnati with me you cast your past life and its associations forever behind you. Is that sufficiently explicit?"

A deadly paleness came to her face, tears starting to her eyes.

He folded her tenderly to him, kissing the tears away.

"We will not quarrel now, my pet," he said, soothingly. "Perhaps I spoke harshly, but you must remember how different your life and mine have been. I have lifted you up to my own level. You are a lady now, and as my wife will be expected to grace that station as becomes the wife of a man of wealth. Do you understand?"

Irma made no reply.

She was weeping silently on his breast, while a frown mottled his brows.

"A regular little innocent," he muttered to himself.

Then the vision of a beautiful blonde face reached his brain, reminding him of another place and another scene.

"Shall we return to the house, my pet?"

Irma suffered herself to be led away without a word.

The tiniest shadow was just dropping its wings over her hitherto happy heart, and the guileless forest girl was soon to learn that even the man she had married believing him a god, was but an idol of clay.

It was midnight. Darkness hung her sable mantle over the forest.

Under the dim starlight, outside of the Dowel cabin, the figure of a man paced up and down in front of the house.

Through the gloom of night a white face gleamed.

Ralph Gerard had struggled for hours to quell the passionate grief that folded his heart and smothered his reason.

Spreading on the express train westward from Detroit, Gerard had felt elated with hope and love. For months he had watched the growing beauty of his cousin, for months he had been comforting himself with the assurance that Irma would one day be his wife.

She was sixteen and a woman in development, and he had resolved on risking his fate by putting the momentous question on his return from Detroit.

Need we wonder then at the awful nature of the grief and amazement, that oppressed him when he learned the truth?

Away by himself he fought out the bitter struggle.

Not one, not even Irma, understood the depth of nature possessed by Ralph Gerard.

Under the midnight stars he paced up and down, trying with the strength of his manhood to crush out the hopeless love that consumed him.

Faded thus in the wretchedness of spirit, Ralph caught sight of a dim light burning in the bridal chamber.

Within that chamber struggled as restless a spirit as the one outside, pacing under the midnight stars.

That night Noel Nelworne had troubled dreams.

His bride slept deeply, but the man's heart side could not rest. Visions of a city home, of a pale, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, haunted him, waking or sleeping.

At last Nelworne sprang from his couch, drew on his clothes and lit the lamp.

"I've been a fool," he muttered, as he seated himself at a small table near the window. "This child-woman fascinated me beyond measure. I was mad, blind, idiotic to think of binding myself to her by the marriage tie. The thing is done, but I must escape from the bonds, which are galling me to the quick. My infatuation is gone. I am myself once again. Poor little fellow!" turning toward his sleeping bride.

"She is a paragon of excellence. That cousin of hers loves her. That is good; he can have her for all of me."

"Even now Virginia awaits my coming. Virginia, my peerless hot-house flower. This mad escapade shall find a fitting burial this night."

It is lucky I did not reveal my true name and place of residence. Noel Nelworne, of Cincinnati, will never be heard of after this night, while Angus Barnwell, of Detroit, will walk the streets free from danger of discovery. I will leave a line for my wife, a sinister smile raising his mustache as he whispered the name.

He slipped a slip of paper from a note-book which he had drawn from his pocket, the man hastily scrawled a few lines thereon and rose to his feet.

"One farewell kiss, my pretty bird," he muttered, crossing the floor with noiseless tread, and bending over his sleeping bride.

Scarcely had his lips touched her cheek when she stirred, a smile coming to her face.

Her lips moved and uttered his name lovingly.

A frown mantled the brow of the treacherous villain.

"Sleep on, sweet girl," he muttered. "You will wake to trouble and woe soon enough."

Smiling another kiss, Nelworne grabbed up a small, leather valise and crept softly from the room, carrying the lamp to guide him to the outer door. Here he extinguished the light and passed out into the shadows of night.

As he glided away a dark form crept stealthily after him.

Ralph Gerard had watched the light as it left the bridal chamber and flitted to the front door. As it was extinguished, the youth crouched low beside the corner of the cabin.

He saw the door open and Nelworne pass out.

"Now, then, we will see if Irma's trust has been betrayed," muttered Gerard, his eyes rapidly in the footsteps of the designing villain.

It was ten miles to the nearest railway station, most of the distance through the forest.

There was a narrow wagon road leading to the station, which Nelworne followed, closely shadowed by Gerard.

The man was high in the heavens when Nelworne reached the depot at the station.

"When will the next train depart?"

"The first train west goes, at 8:45," said the ticket agent in answer to the gentleman's inquiry.

"The train east?"

"Goes at 10:20."

"A ticket for Detroit, please."

This was handed Nelworne.

"You will change cars at River Junction," said the agent.

"Thanks."

Not ten feet from Nelworne stood a muffled form, with a sash at drawn low to conceal his face.

It was Ralph Gerard, and he had heard every word that passed between the ticket agent and Nelworne.

He had seen his cousin walk with his suspicions, and with close-shut teeth he glided from the depot and hastened on his return.

It was almost night when Ralph Gerard entered the house of Irma Nelworne.

After supper the youth strolled out in the garden. He had seen his cousin walk among the trees, and wished to speak with her.

"Good evening, Irma. Why are you looking so sad? What has happened? Where is your husband?"

She looked up in his face, a moist light in her dark eyes.

"Oh, Ralph, Ralph, won't you forgive me?" I could not help it. I loved him so!" cried the young wife, laying both brown hands on his arm.

"You speak of Nelworne?"

"Of my husband, yes."

"Where is he to-day, Irma?"

"Gone to prepare for my removal to his city home."

"What preparation is needed?"

"His father—"

"Was opposed to the match, eh?"

"Knows nothing of it. He is proud, and Noel fears his displeasure."

"And stole away like a thief in the night," said Gerard, bitterly.

"Oh, Ralph!"

"I saw him go, sneaking away like a thief."

Irma's head drooped, hot tears filling her eyes.

"Ralph, Ralph, you wrong Noel. He is everything that is good and noble. I do so want you to be friends."

"Friends?" with a sneer. "Never! But you have not explained why your husband departed in the night, Irma."

For reply the young wife drew a folded slip of paper from her pocket and laid it in the hand of her cousin.

CHAPTER III.

A NOTE OF WARNING.

Ralph Gerard ran over the note.

"IRMA, MY PET:

"I am off for Cincinnati to prepare my proud old father for my wife's reception. You wonder, of course, at my leaving you. I don't think it strange myself, but I dreaded the parting with you. I left a kiss on your lips, and you smiled approvingly, as you dreamed of me. It was better so than having a scene in the morning. You may look for my return in a few weeks. Till then, adieu. Your faithful Noel."

Irma's face grew gradually pale, her large dark eyes dilating strangely.

"No man could be so wicked, Ralph. My Noel is above suspicion."

"Indeed! Poor little innocent. I am sorry for you, Irma."

"I do not ask for your pity," she returned with an angry flush of cheek and brow.

"No, but you have it all the same. Irma, my poor little girl, you have been deceived cruelly, basely deceived. This man, calling himself Nelworne, is an impostor. He has deserted you for the smiles of another. You will never look upon his face again."

"Ralph, Ralph, don't say that, don't say that; don't see now even the suggestion of anything so awful hurts me. Oh, Ralph, Ralph!" and Irma laid her head against his arm, her slight form trembling from head to foot.

"Poor child," stroking her masses of waving, midnight hair.

"If Noel never returns, if you find what I said is true, what will you do then, Irma?"

She struggled free from his caressing hand.

"What will I do? My Heaven! Ralph do not ask me."

"But you must learn the truth in time, Irma."

She drew her lithe form up rigidly, her olive cheeks fading to an ashy hue, her eyes fairly blazing with aroused passion.

"Ralph! Ralph! for Heaven's sake do not tempt me to believe evil of Noel."

"But when you know that he has deserted you—"

"Deserted me?" with a fierce glitter in her eyes, a savage compression of her full red lips. "I can not bear the shame. A deserted wife! Oh, Ralph, have pity on me. When the time comes that I lose my faith in Noel, then I will turn against all the world, then I will live only for revenge, revenge bitter as gall, sweet as Heaven, relentless as death! Don't tempt me, Ralph. I can not doubt my husband. I can not, I must not; I shall go mad if I do."

How fierce and passionate she had grown. The long slumbering tiger in her nature was finding its way to the surface, and Ralph started back terrified at its betrayal.

"You must know the truth, Irma," he said after a time.

"I was up last night when your husband departed. I followed him to the railway station."

"For shame, Ralph!"

"Listen. I suspected the baseness of his character. I acted a spy to satisfy myself. At the station Noel Nelworne bought a ticket for Detroit."

Irma pressed her hand over her heart to hold back its wild throbbing.

She forced a smile to her lips.

"There's nothing wrong in this, Ralph," she said, hoarsely. "Noel had business in Detroit, doubtless. From there he will go to his home in Cincinnati."

"Possibly, but very unlikely."

"I can