

The Unheard Wedding-March.

By CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS.

IT was the close of a rare day in June. Birds and flowers had kept it in time from sunrise to sunset. Lazy white clouds, with nothing else to do, had swept the azure skies, and only those who were being troubled by trouble were other than care-free.

Mariana Leighton was one of those whom trouble was troubling. It was to have been her wedding-day, but Chauncey Haverstraw had not come.

For a full hour she waited at the altar in the little suburban church. Yes, for a full hour she waited, and saw first one by one, and then group by group, her friends and acquaintances steal out of the sacred edifice and go away, their voices rising as soon as they felt they were out of hearing.

The minister had waited for three-quarters of an hour; but he was a methodical man, and his Sunday sermon was due to be written that evening, so with many apologies, he had left her.

"Make yourself perfectly at church," said he. "If Mr. Haverstraw should come, send someone in to the rectory, and I'll come back and marry you; but I am very much afraid that you will not become a Haverstraw to-day."

The lovely girl thanked him for his kindly words. Then, picking out a comfortable pew, she went and sat in it, and gave herself over to sad thoughts.

The five or six who were waiting in the hope that something exciting or scandalous would take place, respected her evident desire to be alone. That is, all but Mrs. Fosguit, who came up to ask her whether, in the event of her not marrying, she would take back the Sunday-school class she had given up.

Now, this was not the first time that Chauncey had disappointed Mariana. She was to have been married exactly a week before; but just as she was arraying herself in her bridal clothes, she had received a telegram from Chauncey:

Invited join theatre party. Bernhardt. Out to-morrow with apologies. Chauncey.

Just ten words!

At first she had been inclined to be angry. It did seem as if even a chance to see Bernhardt should not have been considered paramount on such an evening; but she knew that Chauncey was sincerely devoted to the drama, and so she had telephoned to the rector, asking him to explain the delay and to send the guests home as quietly as possible.

Next day the handsome Chauncey had got away from his desk before closing hour, thanks to his obliging employer, and had gone to ask forgiveness. When he came swinging along with his manly stride, Mariana had not the heart to rebuke him. She met him in the hall with a smile.

"It was playing it rather low down, wasn't it, pet?" said he, as he pressed her cheeks in his ample palms and kissed her pretty upturned face. "You see, I was all ready to start when Bob Heuston ran into the office to say they had seats for Bernhardt, and wouldn't I make one of the party? Well, at ten dollars a seat—and I'm so fond of Bernhardt's acting, from what I've read of it—and I thought it might help me with French, which I hope to take up some time. Don't you understand?"

"Of course I understand, dear. You acted naturally."

"They didn't charge anything for lighting the church, did they?"

Mariana shook her head.

"I don't think they ever do, but I'm afraid the rector was a little disappointed. He told Mrs. Brownson that he had expected to go to the seashore on the fee."

"He couldn't have done it. I wasn't going to give that much."

"It does cost a lot to go to Atlantic City!" said she sadly.

It was one of the places to which they would not go on their wedding tour. There were so many such.

"It really suits me better to postpone it a week," said Chauncey. "We are awfully busy at the office, and it

was a great favour my being allowed to leave ten minutes before closing time."

"When are you going to be taken into the partnership, dear?" asked Mariana.

"It all rests with Stapleton. When he realizes my worth sufficiently I shall soon be a member of the firm, and I may buy a seat on the exchange. Think of it, dear! I began there at two dollars a week only four years ago, and already my wages—my salary, I mean—has been doubled twice. And I'm not yet twenty-six."

"You're a typical American!" said Mariana, and she spoke the truth. There are all sorts of types.

"Well, you'll surely be on hand next week. I'll ask the grocer to tell all his customers how it happened, and it won't be necessary to have more cards engraved."

"No, decidedly not. We must think of the question of expense, dear, until I'm a partner."

II.

All this had happened the week previous, and now Chauncey had apparently been invited to help form another theatre party. It made Mariana wish that she lived near him, because then she might come in for some of the free tickets. She longed to go to the theatre with him. They never had been, as it was so expensive if one took a box, and Chauncey had always said that if he couldn't afford a box he wouldn't go. Of course, window privilege tickets would have been different, but he never got those, as Mr. Stapleton would not allow any shows to be advertised in his Wall-street window.

The sweet-toned bell struck nine. Mariana wiped away a slight moisture in her eyes, and turned around in her seat. Only two others were left in the church—the sexton, and a stranger who had been attracted by the lights. The sexton was an elderly man, but the stranger was young and handsome—

most as handsome as Chauncey. This was the thought that flashed through Mariana's flexible brain.

"Shall I close up, miss?" asked the sexton.

"I suppose you might as well. Something unavoidable has detained Chauncey—Mr. Haverstraw—and if he came now I wouldn't get married to-night because Mr. Chase is busy with his sermon."

The sexton went around putting out the lights. The stranger came out of his pew and walked down the aisle to Mariana.

"Rather vexing!" said he. "My name is Wells. I'm visiting the rich Wellses who live on Audubon Street—although I am no relation. When I saw lights in the church I was sure it was a wedding; but it wasn't. Tell me, in a case like this, does the organist get paid the same as if he had played?"

"No," said Mariana. "The fact is, he was doing it for nothing just to oblige me, because"—she blushed—"because he was in love with me, but I refused him twice. I don't suppose we'll have any music eventually, but he won't charge me for his time this evening, as he had nothing else to do. Every one has been so kind! The grocer told everybody of the postponement."

Mr. Wells knitted his brows.

"How did he know?"

"Oh, I mean the first postponement," said Mariana rather sadly. "You see, Chauncey—Mr. Haverstraw—was to have married me last week, but he had an opportunity to hear Bernhardt for nothing, and so he postponed it. The grocer told every one when he went around for orders."

With unaffected politeness, Mr. Wells took Mariana's arm, and they walked down the aisle together. He gave a little laugh.

"Do you know what I was thinking of?" said he.

"No. What?"

"I was thinking how happy I would be if we were walking down this aisle as husband and wife. Just a thought, you know!"

The disappointed girl laughed softly. "I might be happy, too," was all she said, but it gave encouragement to Mr. Wells.

"Why not do it, say next Tuesday?" said he, in such a tone as would admit of his throwing it off as a joke should she seem displeased.

But Mariana was too amiable a woman to be easily displeased. This stranger had been very kind to her in her loneliness, and she was not ungrateful. Besides, what woman ever took an offer of marriage as an insult!

"Perhaps," she said, "if I were differently situated, I might think of it."

"How can you be differently situated?" said he, almost bitterly. "Mr. Haverstraw is not keen to make you his wife, or he would not have let a play come between him and his marriage."

"You do not know Chauncey," replied Mariana with spirit. "He is a student of the drama—has been one ever since he read somewhere that people of intellect took the drama seriously! And, besides—Bernhardt for nothing!"

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Wells, releasing her arm, and—having come to the vestibule—putting on his hat. "I am to understand, then, that all is at an end between us?"

"No, I don't say that," said the poor girl, driven hither and thither by conflicting emotions.

Mr. Wells went on, unheeding her words. "For all you know, I may be rich—"

Mariana caught her breath at this last word.

"Are you rich?" said she.

"No, but I am young yet, and I'm willing to wait."

"For riches?"

"For you. If I get you—"

"No!" said Mariana quickly, gathering his import. "If you get me, you'll get nothing else. Except for my board, which I have not paid, I haven't a cent. I have been honest with you because, if we were to marry, I could never forgive myself if I thought I had created a false impression as to my pecuniary circumstances."

"Mariana—may I call you Mariana?"

"You have."

"Well, then, following the good precedent, Mariana, what you have said makes me love you more and more."

"It's the way of the world," said Mariana. "Chauncey is just the same. When he is with me he adores me; but he is so busy in New York, and there is so much to do and see, that when he is there—well, I think he forgets me. It's natural."

"No, it is not natural. I never saw or heard of you till to-night, but I could never forget you. You may be absolutely impossible socially, but I tear the thought to shreds and cast it from me. If Haverstraw wants to marry you, he has got to have my permission—and I will never give it!"

Mariana clapped her hands.

"Oh, you are so masterful, and that's one thing that Chauncey isn't—"

"I don't know about that. Seems to me that a man who postpones his wedding twice in a week has elements of masterfulness in him that are worth cultivating."

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