

*Through This Romantic Tale of
Love and Rapture Stalks the
Grim Specter of Tragedy*

The Vow on Halloween

By LYLLIAN HUNTLEY HARRIS

IT WAS Halloween, the time of revelry, when mysticism holds full sway and hearts are supposed to be united beneath the magic glow of dim lanterns. It was the time of apple bobbing, fortune telling, and masking in motley raiment, the whole glamoured over by the light of wishing candles.

Amid such scenes one never thinks of tragedy, but it treads apace, sometimes among the gay revelers, and many a domino or cowl covers that which would make the stanchest heart quake and is as different from the gay exterior as darkness is from light.

The lanterns glimmered, the varicolored lights shading and darkening with the winds that souged through the beautiful old garden where the fete was held.

The pergolas, standing whitely aloof from surrounding density, made wonderful trysting places for the age-old stories of love to be whispered.

"You have made me very happy tonight, Audrey," a deep voice was whispering. "I think that all my after life will be a paean of gratitude for this moment of bliss. When you would vouchsafe no word of hope, not even one of pity, I felt hopeless, broken. Life seemed as senseless as a stupid rhyme! But now, dearest, life's cup is filled to overflowing!"

His lips met hers in a lingering caress.

For a moment the lanterns seemed to flicker and dim. A slight shudder ran over her slender frame. She freed herself gently.

"I cannot expect you to understand, Arthur," Audrey replied, "why you were kept waiting. The silence encompassed the whole of the earth and sky to me. It has been a frightful reality, which my tongue refused to explain until today, and my mental anguish has well nigh swayed my reason. A year ago tonight I experienced a terrible ordeal, more uncanny because it has seemed impossible for me to shake off the pall of it. It has changed the course of my life. For a year I have lived the

life of a senseless thing, a piece of clay, merely breathing, eating, sleeping, but with no soul left me—"

Her voice trailed off into nothingness, and for a while both were silent. He was awed by her utterances. His arm tightened about her.

"Poor Audrey," he whispered, "you must have worried yourself needlessly. Is not illusion a sort of night to the mind which we people with dreams?"

"It was no illusion, Arthur, but grim reality. But last night a dream came to me which seemed to awaken my dead sensibilities, cut loose the spell under which I was living. In it I was commanded to tell you all."

Gently he caressed her.

"Tell me what you wish, dear, and nothing more. Remember, hope is better than memory. I am listening."

"I shall tell you all. You suffered, so nothing shall be withheld. My troubles began when my father had financial reverses. I gave music lessons to eke out a meager income. About this time Rothschild Manny came into my life. He loved me at sight, as intensely as I loathed him. One glance from his slanting, shifty eyes was sufficient to set me cowering in my chair, and if his hand by chance touched mine, cold chills chased over my body. He was like some demon, waiting his chance to spring upon his prey.

"Imagine my dismay, when my parent immediately began insisting on my marriage with this monster! His fortune would retrieve ours and would regain the position we had lost by financial reverses. The horror of it! After one lengthy argument I felt my brain reel, and I fell upon my knees crying and imploring my father to spare me this ordeal. He was obdurate and insisted upon my consent. Finally he sent for Manny, placed my hand in his, and gave me to him formally. But not once did I encourage him, and he seemed to change into a veritable demon. His eyes would become crafty as he looked at me

and his face assume an expression of sardonic intensity.

"One day, the day that is seared upon my memory, one year ago tonight, he sought me out. I was alone in the house, my father having gone to the lodge. Manny was trembling under some terrible emotion.

"Your welcome does not shine forth from your eyes, my dear," he said as he seated himself and took my hand.

"With a gesture of horror I jerked it away. The motion seemed to infuriate him, and deepened the intensity of his eyes.

"I came to take you driving," he said, with a quick intake of his breath. "The night is lovely and my new car is without. It will be yours when you are mine."

"There was a steely intensity in his gaze directed upon me.

"I don't care to go," I said quietly.

"Pray reconsider. I may be able to persuade you to feel differently if you give me a chance."

"Here I interrupted.

"I will do nothing of the sort," I cried, "I will go nowhere with you. I want nothing to do with you, and, God willing, I will never be your wife!"

"My words infuriated him. He was under some powerful influence of evil. He seized my wrist and, jerking me out of my chair, shook me violently.

"My senses reeled, and I must have lost consciousness. All I remember was being held up by main force, those horrible evil eyes boring malevolently into mine while he shouted in my ear:

"Remember—young lady, you will drive with me—yet! Maybe not now, but some day! This is not a threat, it is a declaration, and neither stars, moon nor even heaven itself, shall deliver you from it."

"I was thrown violently upon the floor. Merciful oblivion came to me.

"For days I was ill—not knowing, not caring what happened, craving death to relieve me from the sinister influence and deliver me from the effect of that

horrible vow on Halloween. When I recovered I learned that Manny, driving his car that day madly, had lost control and had come to a horrible end. His evil influence seemed to hold me drugged in its power. I longed to die. But death does not come when one craves it. I lived, a piece of senseless clay, until you came to me; and when I looked into your eyes I felt that heaven had been kind in denying me my desire. My heart, my soul, went out to you, but I couldn't let you know. I could never become your wife with that terrible vow sounding in my ears, that terrible power controlling me.

"Then yesterday, in the dim watches of the night a dream came to me. A voice spoke and said: 'Love beyond price is yours. Take and cherish it, lest this priceless gift be withdrawn!'

"I awoke, happy, myself once more, grateful that life could come to me again."

She nestled close and his hand caressed her hair.

"My darling, how you have suffered. My whole life shall be spent in keeping you free of the mirage of this terrible experience—"

"Beg pardon," a suave voice interrupted, and a cowled figure drew near, "this is my dance, I believe. Is it not too warm to repair to the ballroom? I have my car here. A spin will refresh us both."

The cowled figure bowed low. Audrey glanced at her card, and arose with a little laugh.

"You will excuse me, Arthur, won't you? It seems that this august domino person has prior claim."

With a light hand on the newcomer's arm she was lost in the crowd. The music from the palm-shaded orchestra stirred forth, hummed, throbbed, and sobbed into a soft requiem.

TWO days later, some belated wayfarers came upon a young woman, who seemed unable to move from her seat in an automobile. Upright beside her was a skeleton, whose sightless eye-sockets even then bored into the soul from which the light of reason had fled forever more!

Manny had kept his threat.

And in an old moonlit garden, under the white pergola where he had lived his one moment of bliss, a figure fell, turned into sudden clay, as the smoking weapon could testify.

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