HIS HEIRESS;

OR, LOVE IS ALWAYS THE SAME.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—(CONTINUED.)

Her fingers are still in a listless fashion rippling the calm water of the fountain. Staines takes possession of them, and forcibly draws them from the water. Muriel seems surprised by his action, but not inordinately so.

"Let my hand go," she says, haughtily.

"In one moment." Carefully, yet with an obedient haste, he dries the hand he holds. Perhaps the impatience that thrills through it is not altogether displeasing to him as he lifts his eyes and intently scans the lowered lids and silent face before him. A sad face, pathetic in its studied coldnesss that hides as if with a mask the working, of its owner's heart.

She comes back to the present with a sharp sigh as Staines lays her hand now dry upon her lap.

"Don't put it in again," he says, quietly. "It is still early in the year, and the water is chilly. You may catch cold."

"I never catch cold"—absently—"as you may remember."

"Remember!" he repeats, "When shall I forget, I wonder? What is there in all the sweet days we passed together that I do not remember? do not misunderstand me. Do not for an instant imagine that I regret one single hour. Memory is now the only good that life has left me. The memory of a priceless past?"

"Let the past lie," returns she, coldly. "What have we to do with it? It is gone, dead. No effort, however violent, can bring it within our grasp again."

"I have at least one solace in my desolation," says Staines. "And that is the knowledge that I suffer alone. It is, it shall be, a lasting comfort for me to know that you are as free from regrets as I am overshadowed by them."

"Shadows are movable things," with a faint shrug of her shoulders. "It seems to me that at times you can emerge from yours with a very tolerable success."

"Ay, but they always follow me. In reality there is no escape from them. But be happy in the thought that they do not trouble you—that those old days are by you remembered as a foolish passing dream.'

"Would you have me believe you unhappy;" demands she scornfully.

"I would have you believe nothing displeasing to you. Mold your belief according to your fancy."

"I have none. I have lost all beliefs," declares she. "But don't waste time over that speech. You look as though you had something to say. Say it.'

"You are wrong. I never felt more tongue-tied in my life. I could tell you nothing that is not already old and weary news to you. That I have loved, and that I do love, that I shall love you and you only—for ever and ever!"

She sits quite mute, with her eyes downcast, and her fingers tightly laced, lying in her lap.

"It is an uninteresting tale, is it not?" continues he quietly. "All on the one string. I can make my torture a little keener now and then by a careful reminding of myself that the woman for whom I would have bartered every hope I possess—deliberately—of her own free will—severed between us every tie."

"'For whom you would have bartered all?' Why did you never protest so much as that in those old days you are so fond of recalling?" inquires she.

"I thought I had protested more. I believed my soul as open to your gaze as I madly dreamed yours was to mine. I saw no necessity for words. I was mistaken upon both points. My failure was my own fault, but it is none the less bitter for that."

"If, indeed, you feel as you now pretend, you should never have come to this house," declares she, with slow distinctness.

"I know that now, but then— How could I tell—how be sure how it was with me until I saw you again?" He is speaking with extreme agitation; at this moment indeed, he is sincere enough and the woman before him, standing gazing at him with head erect in all her cold, imperious beauty, seems to him the one desirable thing on earth.

"It seems to me," he goes on, vehemently, "as though I *should* come; as though with my own eyes I must see you, if only once again."

"And—?" Her tone is stern.

"Now I *know*," returns he, "my love still lives—nay, has grown a thousand-fold in its vain strength. I have learned that time holds no hope for me. That I am as sick of life as a man may well be!"

"Why do you stay here if you are so unhappy?" cries she. "Why don't you go?" She rises and stretches out her hand with a quick impulsive meaning. "Go I *beseech* you," she exclaims, feverishly.

"I can not! Some power chains me to the spot. It is a fear, undefined as yet, but it is too strong for me—it holds me here."

"A mere morbid fancy," returns she. "You should despise such vague warnings."

"Not when they point toward you!" She pales perceptibly, and would have spoken, but he prevents her answer and hurries on deliberately.

"If I could manage to forget, I might, indeed, make my escape; but that is impossible. Nor would I care for such oblivion. No! I would not forget. The very voyage that wrecked my happiness will always be the dearest memory I have."

"It is folly—madness," cries she. "You should go."

"Are those your orders?" demands he, sadly. "Do not enforce them. And there is another thing, *how* can I go, and leave you here alone, surrounded by those who—at least—bear you no good will?"

"Give voice to whatever is in your mind," she commands him. "Are you afraid to put your insinuation into plain words? The worst enemies, they tell us, are those of one's household—who is it you would bid me distrust? Speak!—Branksmere? His grandmother?—or perhaps—" she draws her breath sharply,—"Madame von Thirsk?"

"You give me my opportunity," exclaims he, eagerly. "Madame von Thirsk! Do not trust her. I know but little, I have no right to judge, but—do not, I implore you, place faith in that woman."

"I fancied you were madame's friend," she says. "Did I not see you talking to her, just now? It appeared to me that you held very amicable relations with her. I was wrong?"

"How can I say whether you are right or wrong? It is only some hidden instinct that bids me watch her, for your sake." He hesitates openly.

"I would be rid of this accursed doubt," he says, "tell me—you, who should know—what is it there is—between her and—Branksmere?"

Muriel leans heavy against the fountain—no answer falls from her lips. It is all over then? The disgrace is known! Instinctively as it were she has turned to him for support. His pulses throb with unusual force as he recognizes this fact, and closes his own fingers firmly over the beautiful slender ones that come to him of their own accord.

Then in a moment it all passes away—her agitation—the anguish—the deadly shame.

"Must no man dare to have an old friend?" she asks, with an attempt at lightness that is only a miserable failure.

"My beloved! That you should have to endure all this!" murmurs Staines.

And then in a moment, as it were, his arms are round her, and he has pressed her bowed head down upon his breast. She lies there passively. At this time, it seems to her as it there was nothing at all that mattered. What are honor, loyalty, faith? Words—all words! Nothing remains but the knowledge that all the world is at liberty now to jeer at her, and point the finger of scorn at her—the despised wife. Good heavens! Can such things be for her—Muriel Daryl?

All at once a revulsion seizes upon her; she drags herself out of his arms and stands back from him. Of what had she been thinking—she? A terror has fallen upon her, strange, vivid, horrible; a looking into herself that has changed and darkened her face, and made her look like an incarnate fear! Whither is she drifting?

"Muriel, you shall not feel it like this," cries Staines. "Hear me!"

"Nay, sir; be satisfied!" breathes she, heavily. "Am I not degraded enough? At your bidding all was forgotten. I do not see how I am to look any one of them in the face again."

"Let us not talk nonsense," says Staines, with a sudden roughness. "The question now is, how can I help you? I have nothing to offer—nothing save my devotion."

"I want nothing from you," cries she, passionately. "That least of all. Did the whole world combine, do you think it could avenge such a case as mine? And you, of all others, how dare you offer me help! You, to whom I have shown—" Further words refuse to pass her lips. "No—no help from you to me is possible," she says, presently. "Be sure of that. I will accept nothing at your hands. Oh, that I could trample out of sight all that troubles me," she cries, her fingers plucking convulsively at the soft laces that lie upon her bosom.

As she so stands, beautiful in her grief and her cruel self-contempt, a soft, low laugh rings through the shrubbery upon her left.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"This retreat of yours is a positive sanctuary," says Halkett. "It is very dusky in this corner of the balcony, and there is something soothing in the thought that every one is dancing in the rooms within, and that one's own body is idly resting." He had adressed Margery Daryl, but there are two or three others lounging in this quiet, forgotten little spot, hemmed in by the tall shrubs in their huge pots.

Mrs. Daryl is sitting on the sill of the curtained window; Curzon Bellew is leaning over Margery's chair. Peter, and a tall artilleryman called Herrick, are leaning against the ivy, and Peter's last pretty partner is amusing herself with him from the depths of a cushioned lounge.

"If a sanctuary, who gave you permission to invade it?" asks Margery. She has been particularly rightminded up to this rather late hour, and Curzon's soul has been quieted within him, but now, all suddenly as it seems, she wakes into a wicked life, and turns a bewildering smile on Halkett.

"What an unkind speech! Have I not flown to you for refuge? And is this the spirit in which my prayer is received! Seeing you not alone, Miss Daryl, or even *a deux* I took the liberty—"

"Oh, that is nothing. You are always taking that," retorts she. "The question is, what brought you?"

"Need you ask?" reproachfully. "You know I am always unhappy when—?"

"She proves untrue?" This speech has allusion to Mrs. Amyot.

"She always does," says Halkett. "Who should know it so well as you?"

"Who, indeed?"

"Yet you have most cruelly deserted me all to-night; most wantonly you have flung me amongst the Philistines. And all the time you have been dreaming here, or in some other fortunate spot, whilst he who would die to—to—"

"Yes. Don't let it embarrass you; I know all the rest," puts in Miss Daryl, kindly.

"You should! You have served an apprenticeship to it. To know that all the world is groveling at your feet might make you merciful instead of cruel."

"Perhaps you think you are amusing me?" with a soft disdainful uplifting of her dainty chin.

"My natural self-conceit never carried me as far as that."

"That is just as well."

"I don't think you are in a very pretty temper to-night. A generous mistress uses the lash sparingly to her slaves."

"Her favorite slaves, perhaps. Besides, who told you I ever was in a pretty temper?"

"No one. I think myself, so far as I am concerned, you never are."

"The lady of your heart is always good-tempered, of course!" There is another innuendo in this remark; Mrs. Amyot at times being a little impetuous, to say the least of it.

"No. Have I not just this moment told you she never is—to me?"

"The object of your affections—" she begins, saucily.

"Oh, Miss Daryl! 'The object!' For my sake, if not for your own, refrain! I really can not sit silent and hear you call yourself names."

Wilhelmina in the background here so far forgets her self-imposed mission as to burst out laughing. Margery follows suit, and presently Mr. Halkett joins in also.

"Now where does the joke come in?" demands he, mournfully.

"That is what we all want to know," says Curzon.

"All? I don't," says Margery.

"No? You are happy then in not being a prey to the unsatisfied curiosity that is consuming me."

"I am so far a prey to curiosity that I am dying to know what you mean," says Margery.

"I should think my meaning has always been perfectly clear to you," returns he. "By the bye, this is our dance, I believe."

"Is it? I—I don't think I want to dance," returns she.

"Don't you? I wonder then why you come here?" says Mr. Bellew. "The business of a ball is dancing; one can sit and doze at home."

"There are other things besides dancing."

"True! There is flirting," says he, bitterly. Tommy Paulyn runs lightly up the steps to their left and precipitates himself among them.

"What are you all doing here in the dark?" asks he. "All in dumps, eh?" with a glance at Margery and Bellew. "Been to the gardens? They are looking lovely. Try 'em and take my advice. they'd kill your blues in a hurry."

"Did they cure yours, Tommy? Was that why you sought them?" demands Margery.

"No, my dear, I leave the vapors to such thinly minded little girls as yourself. I defy any man, woman, or child to affect my nerves. To deviled oysters alone that proud boast belongs. But the gardens are awfully well got up. Lamps everywhere, and stars and things. The committee ought to be congratulated on its arrangements. They ought to be presented with a Bible or something."

"Not good enough," says Miss Daryl. "According to your account they have managed even the heavens admirably. I don't see what could repay them."

"Will you come and look at them?" asks Curzon, meaning the gardens, not the committee. "It is a charming night, quite sultry."

"Cold, I should have thought," replies she.

"Pouf!" exclaims Mr. Paulyn, lightly. "I like to hear you beginning to be careful of your health. You aren't more delicate than Muriel, are you? and she has been enjoying the midnight breeze with Staines for the last hour." Tommy says this quite gayly, being ignorant of any reason why she should not so enjoy herself.

"Come," Bellew says, earnestly. This time without a word she rises, and moves listlessly down the steps into the scented darkness beyond. "What a fellow your cousin is to talk," he says; "I quite thought by what he said that Lady Branksmere was somewhere out here; didn't you, eh?"

"I know Tommy, and the wildness of his surmisings, better than you do," returns she, evasively. How foolish she was to place any dependence upon any words of Tommy's! With the restoration of her peace of mind returns also her sense of aggravation. And it is at this very moment that Bellew chooses to make a rather unfortunate remark.

"You look pale," he says, solicitously.

"I am sorry I can't look like a dairymaid to oblige you," she says. "However, if my appearance offends you, I must try to correct it." She lifts her hands and administers to her poor cheeks a very vigorous scrub that almost brings the tears to her eyes. "Now, are you satisfied?" she asks, irately, turning to him a wrathful, crimson countenance.

"I don't know what you mean. I can't see why you should speak to me like this," says Mr. Bellew. "When did I express myself as dissatisfied with your face? To me as, you well know, it is the most beautiful face in the world."

"There are a certain class of people whom I detest," returns Miss Daryl, unpleasantly. "You are one of them. Flattery is their strong weapon, and I'm sure you've been paying me meaningless compliments ever since I was born."

"Born!" with a rather derisive laugh. "You can remember since then!"

"I have often heard," icily, "that there are few so clever as those who have at command an unlimited amount of repartee. Experience has also taught me that there are also few so—wearying."

"If I bore you," says Mr. Bellew, "it is most unreasonable of me to inflict my presence on you any longer. Will you come back to the house, or say here whilst I tell Halkett——"

"There! I knew it!" breaks she in. "Anything like your abominable jealousy I have never yet known! I am accustomed to it—but your rudeness to that very inoffensive person does call for comment."

"How was I rude, may I ask?"

"Do you then deny you were in a raging temper all the time he was—was courteously endeavoring to entertain me?"

"Openly endeavoring to make love to you, you mean," exclaimed Bellew. "Do you think I am blind, or a fool, that I can't see through things? I tell you, you were encouraging Halkett in a disgraceful fashion, and that he seemed only too glad of the encouragement."

"I must be a modern Venus," says Miss Daryl, "to inspire all the different men you mention at odd times with a due appreciation of my charms. To-day it was Mr. Herrick—yesterday Lord Primrose—to-night Mr. Halkett. It would cause them some slight embarrassment, I should say, were they to be openly accused of their crime."

"It is not only—" begins he, but she interrupts him mischievously.

"Not only those I have named? True! there is still Mr. Goldie who has also come under your ban. Even that estimable man cannot escape your censure."

"To sneer at me, Margery, is not to convince me. I have loved you too long to be callous on this point. If an end to my dreaming has come, I would know it. "It is my belief that at last you have decided on throwing me over to marry some other man."

"Which of them?" demands she. "Mr. Halkett, who is head over ears in love with Mrs. Amyot, or Lord Primrose, who has neither eyes nor ears for anyone save Lady Anne?"

"There are others," says he, "There is Herrick and—"

She has changed color perceptibly.

"Yes, Herrick," he reiterates in a despairing tone. See when I mention his name how you change color."

"I suppose I can change color if I choose. Is a blush a sin?" asks she.

"No. But I will tell you what it is—the deliberate breaking of a man's heart. I have loved you all my life I think—and you have suffered me, only to tell me now you are going to marry Herrick."

"I am not going to tell you anything," cried she, indignantly. "Am I a Mary Baxter, who, 'refused a man before he axed her'? Am I?'

"Did you refuse him?"

"How could I," evasively, "if he didn't give me the opportunity?"

"You give me your word he did not propose to you?"

"Even if he did—if they all did, what is that to you?" she demands. "You are not my father, or my brother, or my guardian, that you should take me to task—and certainly you shall never be my husband!"

This terrible speech seems to take all heart out of Bellew. He stands, as though stricken into stone, except for the rapid gnawing of his mustache. Will she speak again? If she moves away, what is he to do—to follow, to implore, or to resign al hope, finally?

"If," she declares to herself, "he should stand there, mooning, until the day breaks I shall not be the first to speak!"

She has taken up her fan and detached it from the ribbon that holds it. It startles her, when she finds it roughly taken from her careless fingers and flung to a considerable distance.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" asks he, passionately.

"Nothing returns," she, calmly.

"Do you know you have told me that all things are at end between us?"

"Well," cries she, pettishly, "it is all your own fault. I won't have people jigging about after me, and pretending to look the deepest concern when there is no cause for it. There is nothing on earth so tiresome as being asked every moment whether one has a headache, or if one's neuralgia is worse, or if some iced water wouldn't do one good!"

"And all this," remarks Mr. Bellew "has arisen out of my simple declaration that I thought she was looking a little pale!

'I have been a cross goose, certainly," she confesses with heroic candor; "but never mind. We are friends again now aren't we?"

"We are not," he returns.

"Oh! that as you will, of course," stiffly; "but I thought—"

"I am your lover," declares he. "Nothing you could do or say would alter that fact. You can throw in the friend and welcome. But your lover I am, before and above all else. And so I shall remain whether you wed me, or some other man, or if you never marry at all."

"Do you know I think it will be that," says she. "I am sure I shall never marry—never!"

"Shall we walk on a little further?" asks Bellew.

"I really think, Curzon," says Margery gayly, who has quite recovered herself "that there is one small thing for which an apology is due from you to me. What was that little insinuation of yours about flirting, eh?" You didn't mean it—h'm?"

"Flirting!" he repeats. "I'm sure I shouldn't say or mean anything, intentionally, that would hurt you."

"That's all very well," replies she persistently. "But the thing is, did you mean that? I'm not a flirt, Curzon, am I? And you don't think so, do you?"

"Of course not," he says hastily, "I must have—have been a fool when I said that."

"Only then?" mischievously.

"Then, and now, and always when I am with you," returns he, vehemently.

"I thank you for giving me your choicest hours!" says she. "After all, how could I expect you to give me of your best, I, who am so bent on being an old maid?"

"You, who are so bent on breaking my heart!" replies he, gloomily.

Miss Daryl laughs—a soft, tuneful laugh that rings through the cool night air.

As she looks straight before her, the laughter dies upon her lips. There—there in the moonlight—only a few yards from her, stands Muriel, her face pale, ashen, all the marks of passionate despair upon her beautiful face, and there, too, stands—Staines.

CHAPTER XXX.

Margery steps back again behind the kindly shelter of the evergreens, and Curzon, follows her rapidly, in her hasty walk back to the house.

Not a word or sigh escapes her, yet he, loving her, knows the agony her heart is enduring, and understands but too well the degradation and horror that are possessing her.

"Don't take it so hardly, darling," he says, very tenderly. There is a pause full of doubt, and then Margery turns to him and lays her head upon his breast, and bursts into a passion of silent tears.

"Oh, Curzon!" exclaims she, in a bitter tone.

"There is a great deal of unhappiness in the world, Margery; but you must not take things to heart as though there were no hope, no remedy. How can we tell what Muriel was enduring just now? One can not altogether stifle one's heartbeats, and if she was bidding an eternal farewell to the first love of her life, we should feel nothing but pity for her."

"Oh, that I could dare believe you!" murmurs Margery, sobbingly. "But my heart misgives me."

Muriel had caught sight of her sister on her homeward way, and had told herself she never could be devoutly grateful enough that the girl had not chanced to see her at the fountain as she stood there transfixed with horror of herself, with the first terrible touch of dispair upon her face. That Margery had seen, and judged blindly but correctly of the miserable truth, did not even reveal itself to her. But even now as she steps again into the brilliant glare of the lamps she looks round nervously for the slender, lithesome figure of the girl, and knows a sense of relief when her eyes fail to meet it.

Wilhelmina she greets with a friendly smile, and, hardly pausing to notice her expression moves on to where the lace draperies of the windows form a frame for her; Staines coming to a standstill behind her, looks round him, and in turn meets Mrs. Daryl's rather impressive gaze.

"Take care!" she whispers, "you remember our compact. I will be silent only so long as you give me no cause to speak."

Elevated by the sense of triumph that is still warm within him, he disdains all answer to this warning, only saluting her with an almost defiant and certainly ironical bow.

"As you will," returns she, "but at least remember you are warned!"

He laughs insolently. Something in his manner strikes cold to Wilhelmina. It seems to her at this moment that the other woman is nothing to her. But Margery, *she* will suffer. The memory of the pretty white face that had passed her a few minutes ago returns to Mrs. Daryl with a vividness that is actual pain.

She becomes conscious that Staines is still gazing at her with that mocking smile upon his lips. She falls back once more into the shadow of the window.

Staines, moving up to Lady Branksmere's side addresses her eagerly.

"At least do me the justice to understand I did not mean to offend you," he says.

"What is offense?" muses she. "No one, it seems to me, has power to hurt me, save myself. Yes, I exonerate you from all blame."

"Ah, to be *sure* of your forgiveness," he murmurs eagerly.

"Be sure then," she says, very gently.

"Give me a proof," entreats he. "Tomorrow, the others are all going to the tennis affair at Lady Blount's. Are you, too, going!"

"No!" with a surprised glance; I have decided against it long ago. Tennis bores me. But what has that to do with—"

"To assure me of your pardon," interrupts he, quickly. "Say you will permit me, too, to set aside the invitation for to-morrow, and to accompany you instead in your afternoon walk. That you might in time learn to look askance at me; and all such fears mean death! But if the coming hours hold out to me some hope, I shall surmount my fears. Believe me, I shall not sin again!"

"To-night was a mistake, certainly," she says, "but as I have already told you, I absolve you from all blame. Yes; to-morrow, if you wish, you can walk with me."

Turning her face from him, she looks listlessly around her, and as her eyes travel from wall to wall she becomes at last aware that Branksmere is watching her from a distant door-way with a burning, immovable gaze.

She starts visibly, and is conscious of growing nervous and unsettled beneath it. He had been aware that the flowers his wife held were not those sent to her by him, but he had been far from imagining whose gifts they were until enlightened in a charmingly airy and casual manner by Mme. von Thirsk somewhat later on.

A very tumult of mixed passions is swaying him. That she shall give him an explanation he is determined. But not now. He has written to her, and considering to-night's work she will hardly dare deny him the interview he has demanded on the morrow. In a few short hours he will be face to face with her, and will get an answer to the questions that are clamoring for utterance.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

BITS OF SCIENCE.

One of Mr. Edison's latest discoveries is a method of reproducing phonograms.

Very handsome dresses and window curtains as well are now made of glass in Austria.

Phonograph cylinders are now made of a size suitable for mailing. They have a capacity of 200 words.

The Simplon tunnel from Brieg in Switzerland to Isela in Italy, will be twelve and one-half miles long.

The first nickel-steel crank ever cast in this country was turned out recently at the Bethlehem iron works.

In Germany lightning rods are being tipped with gas carbon. Points of this material, unlike those of metal, are infusible and are not corroded by the air.

A new cigarette machine has been invented by a man in Winston, N. C., that it is said, will feed, roll, paste and make 10,000 perfect cigarettes in ten hours.

Edison is working on a magnetic ore separator. The only obstacle in the way of its success at present is the necessity of crushing the ore to a very fine powder before the separating process.

A sensitive paint has been invented which should prove useful for detecting hot bearings in machinery. It is always bright yellow when cold, but gradually changes color on being heated, and at 220 degrees becomes bright red.

A Rhode Island sculler rejoices in possessing an aluminum shell, made wholly of that metal, that weighs only twenty-three pounds, all rigged. It measures thirty-one feet eight inches over all, but is less than a foot wide.

A new glass which is nearly impervious to the calorific rays is made in Germany from 70 parts of sand, 25 of china clay and 34 of soda. A plate a third of an inch thick allowed only 11 or 12 per cent of the heat from a gas burner to pass.

The fiber of banana stalks is proposed as a substitute for jute in the manufacture of wrapping paper. The commercial possibilities of such an industry are being seriously considered in Nicaragua in view of the partial failure of the East Indian jute crop.

The method adopted by an electric lighting company of London in laying their connections consists of copper strips conducted along their entire system in culverts underground. A terrier has been trained to do this work and carries the electric wires through the culverts with the skill of an experienced workman.

Simpkins Safe.

"Ef that young squirt of a Simpkins comes here again," angrily exclaimed Pap Muggins, "by jocks I'll read the riot act to him!"

"No you won't dad," replied his buxom, red-cheeked daughter, taking another look at herself in the glass. "You won't do anything of the kind."

"Why won't I?" stormed the old man, bringing his fist down on the table.

"Because, dad," said the maiden, giving her frizzes another dexterous jab with her taper fingers, "you can't read, you know."

The most precious collection of German wines in the world is that stored away in the cellars of the Grand Duke of Luxemberg. Some of the vintages date back to 1706.