

HIS HEIRESS;

OR, LOVE IS ALWAYS THE SAME.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"You knew this gentleman abroad?" asks Lord Brankmere, who has noted the suppressed indignation that is making the small frame tremble.

"You have guessed it, Brankmere. This gentleman and I are well acquainted," she stops suddenly, as though it is impossible for her to go on. How is she to tell it? Yet she has promised Margery to save this wilful woman. She flings from her all thought of self, and, stepping more clearly into the moonlight, throws out her hands towards Staines.

"This man," she says, in a clear, thrilling tone, "once did me the honor to seek to dishonor me."

Her face falls forward into her hands. "Great Heaven! This is more than one should dare expect of you," cries Lord Brankmere, in deep agitation.

Mrs. Billy lifts her head and looks at Staines for the last time.

"My husband knows all," she says, the words coming reluctantly from between her teeth. "If you would retain your miserable life, escape from this without delay!"

"Is this thing true?" asks Lady Brankmere, going straight up to Staines. He is silent.

"Speak, man! Answer?" cries she, imperiously, with a stamp of her foot.

"No," lies the miserable wretch, with falsehood written in the very swaying and bending of his cowardly frame. What she sees convinces her.

"Liar!" she gasps beneath her breath. Lord Brankmere is now close to Staines, who makes a movement as though to depart, but he lays his hand quickly upon his arm, gives him a sudden jerk that brings him to the front in a second.

"My good fellow, don't go until we come to an understanding."

The gallant captain, whose knees seem here to cease to be a portion of himself, mutters something in a weak whisper that as yet is unknown.

"I have disturbed you, madame," she says, coldly.

"Not at all. I was but looking on the night," she answers in a somewhat quavering voice that is hardly so carefully English as usual.

"A gloomy picture." On the instant it crosses Muriel's mind that this woman knew something of her intended flight.

Even as she ponders hurriedly on these imaginings, a slight repetition of the cry that had come to her twice before, startles her into more active thought. Looking round instinctively to Madame she finds she has disappeared, and that she is standing alone in the ante-room. Crossing hurriedly to the dowager's door she knocks.

It is opened by Brooks; the pale, still woman who had struck Muriel so many times before as being almost bloodless.

"Her ladyship is not well to-night, my lady. I think it will be wiser not to excite her with your presence."

"Has Lord Brankmere given you orders to forbid my entrance here?"

"No, my lady. But believe me it will be wiser not to enter to-night. It will be better for you to leave this."

"So I shall when I have seen Lady Brankmere."

"You can not see her ladyship to-night," says the woman in a tone of ill-suppressed anger that is curiously mixed with fear.

"Let me pass," returns Muriel, curtly. For the instant it occurs to her that the woman means to resist her, but a thin, high, terribly piercing old voice coming to them, checks any further argument. It is the dowager's.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"Who is there mumbering at that door, Brooks? Let 'em in; let 'em in, I say. Am I to be kept imprisoned here by you, with no one to give me ever a good-day? Let 'em in, I tell you."

"It is I, Lady Brankmere."

"And who are you, oh? Oh?" demands the old creature, lifting her weird face to stare at Muriel, whom she has seen in the morning. "You are not the other one, are you?"

"The other?"

"Yes, yes. The little one in her white gown. So pretty; so pretty," mumbles the old lady, her head nodding as if gone beyond her control in her excitement. "Such a little thing."

"Hash, madame! You don't know what you are saying," interposes Brooks, sharply. "Sometimes she raves, my lady, and you know I warned you she was not well to-night."

"You are wrong, Brooks; wrong. It was a white gown; and there was blood upon it—bright specks of blood. Eh? Eh? I recollect it all. Eh? Oh! my bonny boy—my handsome laddie!" Muriel now, having bidden her good-night, she moves toward the door. As Brooks with her eyes on the ground holds it open for her, another cry, very low and subdued, seems to creep to her through the semi-darkness of the apartment.

Muriel lifts her head sharply.

"There it is again. That was not Lady Brankmere," she says, scrutinizing the woman's face keenly. But it never moves.

"What is it, my lady?"

"That terrible cry. It sounded like the wail of a hurt animal," answers Muriel, with a shudder.

"I heard no cry, my lady," says the woman, sullenly. "But they do say this corridor is haunted."

With a last glance at her impassive countenance, Muriel steps from the room and hurries swiftly out of sight, her head throbbing, her heart beating wildly.

She sinks upon a low stool, and lets her proud head fall until it rests upon her knees round which her hands are clasped. A forlorn figure, void of hope.

And now what is left her? How can she endure the daily intercourse with Brankmere—the chance meetings with Madame. These last may indeed be avoided, as Madame for the last week or two has elected to dine in her own rooms, stating as her pretext that the dowager is falling fast; to attend whom is evidently an arduous task, as Madame has grown singularly wan and dejected during this fortnight.

No sleep comes to her this night. Broad awake, she lies, hour after hour, with her eyes wide in the darkness, and her tired

brain rushing through the arid plains of past griefs and joys.

The dawning of the morn finds her still with her eyes open, staring eagerly for the first faint flecks of light.

The chill soft breeze that heralds the opening day has hardly yet arisen, however and darkness still covers the land. A figure, cloaked and hooded, emerging from the quaint old oaken door on the western side of the Castle, looks nervously round her as she steps into the blackness and tries to pierce it. Moving swiftly and unerringly, with light, firm footsteps in the direction of the wooded path to her right, she enters the line of elms, and makes for a dense bit of brushwood further on. Arrived at it she pauses, and a low "cooee" issues from her lips; it is answered presently, and the woman, drawing a tiny lantern from beneath her cloak, turns it full upon the man who has answered her call.

It is Staines, though it is easier to recognize him by his clothes than his features. Bruised, swollen, utterly demoralized in appearance, it is no wonder that the woman on first glancing at him gives way to an exclamation of horror.

"What is it; what has happened, then?" cries she, in a low tone. "I sent for you that I might learn how the affair fell through, but I had not expected this." Madame points expressively at his disfigured face.

"Well, well, well!" she exclaims, impatiently, as he makes her no reply. "How is it with you?"

"It is all up," snarls he, hoarsely. "Nothing now is left but flight."

"What you have failed?" hisses she through her teeth. "With the game in your hands you have lost! Ach! in her own language, and stamps her foot with irrepressible passion upon the ground.

"Oh! to have toiled, and lied, and worked for—this!" cries she, wildly. "How I have labored to place that woman under my feet that I might trample on her, crush her, and now—to be entirely balked of my revenge, and all through your imbecility."

"Hers rather. Had she not told Brankmere of her determination to leave him, she would have been well out of your path by this time. He would gladly have been rid of her, I believe, but she misunderstood him when she supposed he would make no fight for his honor."

"Well, you have lost your money," says she.

"Why! no. It appears she had made up her mind not to touch a penny of it."

"Hah!" She comes nearer to him and examines his features (which look rather mixed) in a curious way. "So that was why you did not make a greater stand," she cries. "When the money failed you, you cried off! You have been false to our bargain. Her frame trembles with passion. She goes nearer to him still, and turns the lamp, with an insolent air, on his bowed figure, and the generally craven appearance that marks him. "So he beat you!" she cries exultantly. "Beat you before her—your ideal! Ach—the brave fellow!" She breaks into a loud, derisive laugh.

"Go home, you she-devil, before I murder you," breathes Staines, fiercely.

CHAPTER XLV.

"Well!" exclaims Mrs. Billy, in a heart-felt tone. She sinks into a chair and looks round her—the very picture of misery.

"What a cruel shock to him, poor fellow. I assure you the news has made me feel just anyhow. Such a thing to go and happen to him."

"It is a beastly shame," says Dick indignantly.

"What is? What's the matter?" asks Mr. Pauly, sauntering into the room at Angelica's heels, with whom it is quite evident he is not now on speaking terms.

"Why, haven't you heard?" asks Mrs. Billy, with tears in her eyes, "about poor Curzon? The failure of that Cornish mine has ruined him."

"Bless my soul! cries Tommy. "What a horrid thought! Where is he? Who told you? It's a lie most likely."

"No such luck," returns Billy dejectedly. "It's only too true. Poor old chap! I had a line from him about an hour ago, and Peter has run down to him to bring him up here. He can't be left by himself, you know."

"So that young man has come to grief, hey?" calls out a gruff old voice from the hall outside. "Never thought much of him myself," Sir Mutius by this time has entered the room. "Fools and their money soon part."

Mrs. Billy casts a glance at her husband, after which they both break into untimely mirth.

"Ah! you can laugh, can you," growls Sir Mutius, "when your chief friend is so sore smitten! Poor comfort he'll get from you, I' faith, in spite of all your protestations. Well, I'm glad I never professed affection for the young man, I've the less trouble now. How about you, Margery? He was a beau of yours, eh?"

"A fortunate thing now, Margery, as things have turned out—hey? If you had engaged yourself to him you might have had some difficulty in getting out of it, and marriage with a beggar would hardly suit you—eh?—ha!—Oh! Good-morrow, Bellevue; good-morrow!"

"You are right, Sir Mutius, marriage with a beggar means only misery," says Curzon calmly, who had entered the room during the old man's speech.

"It is quite true, then, Curzon? Is there no chance for you?" asks Angelica, who has run to him, and thrown her arms round his neck to give him a loving kiss.

"None whatever," bravely, "in the way you mean. I went up to my lawyer about this morning, and it appears when all is over and done I shall be left with about £400 a year. Nothing can be done," says Curzon, turning round again. "I've thought it all out, and in time I shall be reconciled to it. I shall forget it all—that is"—looking down—"nearly all! And one can work, you know; and there's many a fellow hasn't even £400 a year."

"No, by Jove," acquiesces Dick heartily, who hasn't a penny beyond what his brains will bring him.

"I dare say to some, therefore, that amount might mean riches," goes on Curzon, pleading his own cause bravely, "though I agree with you, Sir Mutius"—looking at him with a kind smile—"that it really does mean beggary. But that is the result of one's training."

"No, no, don't mistake me," says the old baronet. "There is great scope for a young man's intellect when backed up with a little capital. You might go to New Zealand, for

example—a fine opening there—or to Australia, or to Canada."

"Or to the deuce!" supplements Billy cheerfully. "But after all, perhaps, none of us, however lucrative the post, would hardly care to see him there."

"You are flippant, William," growls Sir Mutius, frowning.

"What Sir Mutius means," says Curzon boldly, though his lips turn very white, "is, that he would be glad to see me well out of this country because of Margery."

"I am very glad to hear it from your lips too, although I knew it before. My niece, sir, is a young woman of sense. She will marry well, if she marries at all."

"That is quite true!" The voice is Margery's, and a sudden silence falls upon the room as she speaks. She has risen from her seat, and is looking with her beautiful eager eyes full at Bellevue. "I shall do well indeed if I marry Curzon. Will you have me," she asks him softly.

"No—no," cries Bellevue, pressing her back from him. "I understand the sacrifice, my—Don't make it so hard for me Margery; you are all so kind, so tender, and now, this from you!—my best friend no."

"Ah! murmurs she piteously, in a very agony of distress. "Why—don't you know?" she covers her face with her hands. "Take me away from this," she whispers, faintly.

"Yes, go. Into the garden—anywhere! believe her—believe every word she says," cries Mrs. Billy, pushing them both towards the door.

"Let me speak," cries she distractedly. "Oh! Curzon, there is something—a small thing—just one thing that I must tell you."

"That you never really cared for me! Why I knew that, my love," replies he rather wearily.

"No. Oh! no." She stands back from him, and glances at him rather shamedly. Then comes a step nearer. "It is only—that I do love you so!" she cries suddenly, the tears running down her cheeks.

"Won't you have me for your wife, Curzon?" she whispers tremulously, and then in a moment she is in his embrace, their arms round each other, their eyes look long, as though each would search the other's heart, and when at last their lips meet, ruin and trouble and possible poverty are forgotten, and a breath from heaven is theirs.

"How much you have borne from me," she murmurs softly. "I have thought it all out long ago, you see, but I never was certain of myself until to-day."

"Until I told you that I had lost everything?"

"Yes."

"Then I am glad that mine failed," says this foolish young man, simply and truly, and from his heart.

"That isn't a very wise thing to say, is it?" murmurs Miss Daryl, thoughtfully. "And yet, do you know, I myself don't feel sorry."

"Of course, we shall have something," says he ruefully. "But £400 a year! It is penury."

"It is opulence," gayly, "with the love we can throw in."

"How I love you," he breathes, rather than speaks.

She laughs softly, and the dawn of a blush breaks upon her cheek.

"I know that," she says saucily. "If you don't trust me, you see I trust you. But of one thing I warn you, Curzon, that I am not married to you yet. There is many a slip, you know."

"Not when one is fairly caught."

"Caught!" stepping daintily behind a rose-bush. "Who said that word? Am I caught, think you? Well, a last chance then! If you catch me before I reach the yew-tree over there, I'll—"

Most untruly she starts away across the velvet sward, straight for the desired harbor, giving him hardly time to understand her challenge. But love has wings, and before she has reached the aged yew she is in his grasp, and once for all she owns him conqueror.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Mme. v n Thirsk has fallen asleep. A glorious flood of October sunshine streaming into the library reveals this fact.

She looks anything but her best; to look that, one must be happy, and grief and she appear to be on friendly terms.

Lady Brankmere, who has entered the room in her usual slow, lifeless fashion, so lightly as to fail to disturb so heavy a sleeper, draws near to her through a sort of fascination, and standing over her, stares down upon, and studies the face, so impenetrable as a rule, but now laid bare and unprotected in its unconsciousness.

For a long time she gazes upon the woman, when something catches her eye, rivets her attention immovably and puts an end to her idle examination.

After all it is only a key. A well-sized key of a very ordinary type.

Lady Brankmere's lips pale, and her eyes grow bright. Not for one moment does she hesitate. Taking up a pair of scissors lying on the table near, she cuts deliberately the sicken cord, and possessing herself of the key leaves the room.

Not once does her heart fail her. And when she stands before Madame's door and fits the key into the lock, and throws it open, and at last crosses the threshold of the forbidden chambers, no sense of fear, no desire to draw back whilst yet there is time, oppresses her, only a longing to solve the problem that for so many days has been an insult to her.

She throws up her head, and it is with a sense of positive triumph that she steps into the first room and looks around her.

Muriel takes it in at a glance, and hastens toward the door opposite to the one she has entered. It leads to a room, small, and evidently meant as a mere passage from the room left beyond, the door of which is partially open. Muriel has half crossed this ante-chamber, when a soft musical sound, coming apparently from some place near at hand, causes her to stand still. The voice of one singing. Yet hardly singing, either. The sound is sweet, and pathetic, and young!

Muriel's heart begins to beat tumultuously. A voice here, a woman's voice, and Mme. von Thirsk asleep down-stairs! What can this mean? She pushes open the half-closed door, and steps lightly into the room.

At the far end of it, seated on a prie-dieu, with her lap full of flowers, sits a girl—a pale, slender girl—dressed all in white. Her eyes are lowered, and she is playing in a curiously absent way with the blossoms

amongst which her fingers are straying aimlessly, and is singing to them in that strange monotone that had startled Muriel.

Now she looks up. She stares straight at Muriel, and her eyes are a revelation. They are blue, but such an unearthly blue, and what is the cold dull gleam in them? And are they looking at Muriel, or at some object beyond her? Her fingers still play idly among the flowers, whilst these strange eyes of hers are wandering vaguely.

"Come in, come in," she murmurs eagerly, so eagerly that Muriel ponders within herself as to whether she and this white, smiling girl may not have met before under different circumstances. That she betrays no agitation, no awkwardness at thus coming face to face with the hostess who has not invited her to her house, is strange indeed. She is looking unconcernedly at Muriel, with a smile upon her lips.

"More; have you brought more?" asks the pale girl anxiously, leaning forward, the eternal smile still upon her face. It seems to Muriel that she would be almost more than beautiful but for the nameless something that mars her expression.

She waves her hand about the room blithely, and Lady Brankmere following her gesticulations, sees that the apartment is literally crowded with flowers, of all kinds and all hues, save one. No crimson, red, or scarlet blossom lies among them.

She brings back her glance again to the girl, and now regarding her more fixedly, perceives that the face is not so young as she had at first imagined. She creeps closer to Muriel and whispers slyly.

"Do you know whose birthday it is?"

"No," in a frozen tone.

"No? Why it is his! That is why the flowers are here, the flowers he loves so well." Muriel stares at her. Brankmere's passion for flowers had not come beneath her notice.

"To-night, is his festival, and we shall keep it merrily! Listen!" She holds up one forefinger, and advances upon Muriel, as Muriel instinctively recoils with horror from her touch. "If you wish it, you shall be invited too! I'll get him to ask you; don't let Thekla know. Thekla, little cat! We shall outwit her," she cries.

"We?"

"Ay. You and I and he."

"What is Brankmere to you?" cries Muriel sharply.

"Do you not even know that? Why—my husband!" returns the stranger, with a peculiar little jerky wave of her hand. A low cry breaks from Muriel. "To-night, to-night you shall be made known to him!" goes on the girl lightly.

She laughs. To her dying day Lady Brankmere never forgets that laugh.

"You will come, you pale thing!" she asks, eagerly, "and we'll sing to him, you and I."

Her voice now is slightly raised, her manner excited. "And well dance, too."

She lifts her feet one by one in a jerky fashion, and sways to and fro in a very ecstasy of delight.

"Join in—join in!" she calls to Muriel, and twirls herself round and round with a terrible speed, and laughs again. A wild laughter this time, that ends in a wilder shriek.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

How He Got His Start.

"I got my start in a queer way," remarked a man of evident wealth, as the drummer finished his story.

"How was that?" enquired the drummer.

"Twenty-five years ago," continued the successful citizen, "I was travelling with a side-show, and the business went to pieces, leaving me its creditor for wages to the amount of \$100. My share of the stock-in-trade was an anaconda about 18 feet long, and as big around as my body. It wasn't fat though, I think, for air was about the only thing it had to live on for several weeks before the failure. I took the snake and started for St. Louis, where I proposed to exhibit it."

"I had him in a box in the baggage-car, and somehow he got out and started through the train on an exploring expedition. Just as he was crossing the platforms of the second and third coaches the couplings came loose, and there's no telling what would have happened, for we were going up a heavy mountain grade, if the snake hadn't twisted himself around the brake-rods and railing, and hung on. It was a big strain on him, but he stuck to it, and I'm a lawyer if he didn't hold the train together for two miles, and no doubt saved the lives of all the passengers in the rear coaches. They thought so, anyhow, and made me up the purse of \$500."

The drummer coughed.

"What became of the anaconda! he enquired casually.

"He gave me my start," replied the narrator. "You see, the \$500 wasn't a drop in the bucket; but when we got the snake loose the strain on him had stretched him out 21 feet longer, and I went into St. Louis with a snake that no other exhibitor could hold a candle to, and if you don't believe me I can show you that snake stuffed and hung up in my hall at Denver."

The drummer got up with the air of a man who was uneasy.

"You ought to sell it for a telegraph pole," he said, reproachfully, and then went out.

One Boy's Ambition.

A young man who had been tramping through Europe for several years returned to New York the other day. He went to call upon his married sister and found the baby in arms he had left when he started upon his journey had grown to be a smart youngster nearly five years old.

"This is your Uncle Dick," said mamma. "Now, say you are glad to see him."

"Where'd u come from?" blurted out the youngster, staring hard at his new found uncle.

"Oh, I've been 'way, 'way across the sea," replied Uncle Dick genially. "You're a fine little fellow," he continued, patting his nephew upon the head. "What do you want to be when you are grown up?"

"Well," thoughtfully replied the boy, kicking a train of toy cars into the corner, "I think I'd like to be an orphan."

A Valued Playmate.

Little Johnny; "I'm awful sorry your parents is goin' to move."

Neighbour's boy; "Is you?"

Little Johnny; "Yes. Now whenever I break a window or anything, I can't tell mamma you did it."