

## LOVERS YET.

(By the author of "Madoline's Lover.")

### CHAPTER XXII.

The evening of his return was one of the happiest of Lord Earle's life. He was charmed with his daughters. Lady Helena thought, with a smile, that it was difficult to realize the relationship between them. Although her son looked sad and careworn, he seemed more like an elder brother than the father of the two young girls.

There was some little restraint between them at first. Lord Earle seemed at a loss what to talk about; then Lady Helena's gracious tact came into play. She would not have dinner in the large dining-room; she ordered it to be served in the pretty morning-room, where the fire burned cheerfully and the lamps gave a flood of mellow light. It was a picture of warm, cozy English comfort, and Lord Earle looked pleased when he saw it.

Then, when dinner was over, she asked Beatrice to sing; and she, only too pleased to show Lord Earle the extent of her accomplishments, obeyed. Her superb voice, with its clear, ringing tones, amazed him. Beatrice sang song after song with a passion and fire that told how deep the music lay in her soul.

Then Lady Helena bade Lillian bring out her folio of drawings, and again Lord Earle was pleased and surprised by the skill and talent he had not looked for. He praised the drawings highly. One especially attracted his attention—it was the pretty scene Lillian had sketched on the Mayday now so long passed—the sun shining upon the distant white sails, and the broad, beautiful sweep of sea at Knutsford.

"That is an excellent picture," he said—"it ought to be framed. It is too good to be hidden in a folio. You have just caught the right coloring, Lillian; one can almost see the sun sparkling on the water. Where is the sea view taken from?"

"Do you not know it?" she asked, looking at him with wonder in her eyes. "It is from Knutsford—mamma's home."

Ronald looked up in sudden, pained surprise. Mamma's home! The words smote him like a blow. He remembered Dora's offence—her cold letter, her hurried flight, his own firm resolve never to receive her in his home again—but he had not remembered that the children must love her—that she was part of their lives. He could not drive her memory from their minds. There before him lay the pretty picture of "mamma's home."

"This," said Lillian, "is the Elms. See those grand old trees, papa? This is the window of mamma's room, and this was our study."

He looked with wonder. This, then, was Dora's home—the pretty, quaint homestead standing in the midst of green meadows. As he gazed, he half wondered what the Dora, who for fifteen years had lived there, could be like. Did the curling rings of dark hair fall as gracefully as ever? Had the blushing, dimpled face grown pale and still? And then, chasing away all softened thought, came the remembrance of that hateful garden scene. Ah, no, he could never forgive—he could not speak of her even to these, her children! The two pictures were laid aside, and no more was said of framing them.

Lord Earle said to himself, after his daughters had retired, that both were charming; but though he hardly owned it to himself, if he had a preference, it was for brilliant, beautiful Beatrice. He had never seen any one to surpass her. After Lady Helena had left him, he sat by the fire dreaming, as his father long years ago had done before him.

It was not too late yet, he thought, to retrieve the fatal mistake of his life. He would begin at once. He would first give all his attention to his estate; it should be a model for all others. He would interest himself in social duties; people who lamented his foolish, wasted youth should speak with warm admiration of his manhood; above all other matters he dreamed of great things for his daughters, especially Beatrice. With her beauty and grace, her magnificent voice, her frank fearless spirit, and piquant, charming wit, she would be a queen of society; through his daughter his early error would be redeemed. Beatrice was sure to marry well; she would bring fresh honors to the grand old race he had shamed. When the annals of the family told, in years to come, the story of his mistaken marriage, it would be amply redeemed by the grand alliance Beatrice would be sure to contract.

His hopes rested upon her, and centered in her. As he sat watching the glowing embers there came to him the thought that what Beatrice was to him he had once been to the father he was never more to see. Ah, if his daughter should be like himself—if she should ruin his hopes, throw down the fair castle he had built should love unworthily, marry beneath her, deceive and disappoint him! But no, it should not be—he would watch over her. Lord Earle shuddered at the thought.

During breakfast on the morning following his return, Lady Helena asked what were his plans for the day—whether he intended driving the girls over to Holte.

"No," said Lord Earle, "I wish to have a long conversation with my daughters. We shall be engaged during the morning. After luncheon we will go to Holte."

Ronald, Lord Earle, had made up his mind. In the place where his father had warned him, and made the strongest impression upon him, he would warn his children, and in the same way; so he took them to the picture-gallery, where he had last stood with his father.

With gentle firmness he said, "I have brought you here, as I have something to say to you which is best said here. Years ago, children, my father brought me, as I bring you, to warn and advise me—I warn and advise you. We are, though so closely related, almost strangers. I am ready to love you, and do love you. I intend to make your happiness my chief study. But there is one thing I must have—that is, perfect openness; one thing I must forbid—that is, deceit of any kind, on any subject. If either of you have in your short lives a secret, tell it to me now. If either of you love any one, even though it be one unworthy, tell me now. I will pardon any imprudence, any folly, any want of caution—everything save deceit. Trust me, and I will be gentle as a tender

woman; deceive me and I will never forgive you."

Both fair faces had grown pale—Beatrice's from sudden and deadly fear; Lillian's from strong emotion. "The men of our race," said Lord Earle, "have erred at times; the women never. You belong to a long line of noble, pure, and high-bred women; there must be nothing in your lives less high and less noble than in theirs; but, if there has been—if, from want of vigilance of training and of caution, there should be anything in this short past, tell it to me now, and I will forget it."

Neither spoke to him one word, and a strange pathos came into his voice as he continued.

"I committed one act of deceit in my life," continued Lord Earle; "it drove me from home, it made me an exile during the best years of my life. It matters little what it was—you will never know; but it has made me merciless to all deceit. I will never spare it; it has made me harsh and bitter. You will both find in me the truest, the best of friends, if in everything you are straightforward and honorable; but, children, dearly as I love you, I will never pardon a lie or an act of deceit."

"I never told a lie in my life," said Lillian proudly. "My mother taught us to love truth."

"And you, my Beatrice?" he asked, gently, as he turned to the beautiful face, half averted from him.

"I can say with my sister," was the haughty reply, "I have never told a lie. Even as she spoke her lips grew pale with fear, as she remembered the fatal secret of her engagement to Hugh Fernely."

"I believe it," replied Lord Earle. "I can read truth in each face. Now tell me—have no fear—have you any secret in that past life? Remember, no matter what you may have done, I shall freely pardon it. If you should be in any trouble or difficulty, as young people are at times, I will help you; I will do anything for you, if you will trust me."

And again Lillian raised her sweet face to his.

"I have no secret," she said simply. "I do not think I know a secret, or anything like one. My past life is an open book, papa, and you can read every page in it."

"Thank heaven," said Lord Earle, as he placed his hand caressingly upon the fair head. "It was strange, and he remembered the omission afterward, that he did not repeat the question to Beatrice—he seemed to consider that Lillian's answer included hers. He did not know her heart was beating high with fear."

"I know," he continued, gently, "that some young girls have their little love secrets. You tell me you have none. I believe you. I have but one word more to say. You will be out in the great world soon, and you will doubtless both have plenty of admirers. Then will come the time of trial and temptation: remember my words—there is no cause so great as a clandestine love, no error so great or so degrading. One of our race was so cursed, and his punishment was great. No matter whom you love or who loves you, let all be fair, honorable, and open as the day. Trust me; do not deceive me. Let me in justice say, I will never oppose any reasonable marriage, but I will never pardon a clandestine attachment."

"However dearly I might love the one who so transgressed," continued Lord Earle, "even if it broke my heart to part from her, I should send her from me at once; she should never more be child of mine. Do not think me harsh or unkind: I have weighty reasons for every word I have uttered. I am half ashamed to speak of such things to you, but it must be done. You are smiling Lillian, what is it?"

"I should laugh, papa," she replied, "if you did not look so very grave. We must see people in order to love them. Beatrice, how many do we know in the world? Farmer Leigh, the doctor at Seaby, Dr. Goode who came to the Elms when mamma was ill, two farm laborers and the shepherd—that was the extent of our acquaintance until we came to Earlescourt. I may now add Sir Harry Holt and Prince Borgezi to my list. You forget, papa, we have been living out of the world."

Lord Earle remembered with pleasure that it was true. "You will soon be in the midst of a new world," he said, "and before you enter society I thought it better to give you this warning. I place no control over your affections; the only thing I forbid, detest, and will never pardon, is any underhand or clandestine love-sick affair. You know now what they would cost."

He remembered afterward how strangely silent Beatrice was, and how her beautiful, proud face was turned from his.

"It is a disagreeable subject," said Lord Earle, "and I am pleased to have finished with it—it need never be renewed. Now I have one thing more to say—I shall never control or force your affections, but in my heart there is one great wish."

Lord Earle paused for a few minutes he was looking at the face of Lady Alice Earle, whom Beatrice strongly resembled.

"I have no son," he continued, "and you, my daughters, will not inherit title or estate—both go to Lionel. If ever the time should come when Lionel asks either of you to be his wife my dearest wish will be accomplished. And now as my long lecture is finished, and the bell has rung, we will prepare for a visit to Sir Harry and Lady Lawrence."

There was not much time for thought during the rest of the day; but when night came, and Beatrice was alone, she looked the secret of her life in the face.

She had been strongly tempted, when Lord Earle had spoken so kindly, to tell him all. She now wished she had done so; all would have been over. He would perhaps have chided her simple, girlish folly, and have forgiven her. He would never forgive her now that she had deliberately concealed the fact; the time for forgiveness was past. A few words, and all might have been told: it was too late now to utter them. Proud of her and fond of her as she saw Lord Earle was, there would be no indulgence for her if her secret were discovered. She would have to leave the magnificent and luxurious home, the splendor that delighted her, the glorious prospects opening to her, and return to the Elms, perhaps never to leave it again. Ah, no, the secret must be kept! She did not feel much alarmed; many things might happen. Perhaps the Seagull might be lost—she thought without pain or sorrow of the

probable death of the man who loved her as few love.

Even if he returned, he might have forgotten her or never find her. She did not feel very unhappy or ill at ease—the chances, she thought, were in her favor. She had but one thing to do—to keep all knowledge of her secret from Lord Earle.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

As time passed on all constraint between Lord Earle and his daughters wore away; Ronald even wondered himself at the force of his own love for them. He had made many improvements since his return. He did wonders upon the estate; model cottages seemed to rise like magic in place of the wretched tenements inhabited by poor tenants; schools, almshouses, churches, all testified to his zeal for improvement. People began to speak with warm admiration of the Earlescourt estates and of their master.

Nor did he neglect social duties; old friends were invited to Earlescourt; neighbors were hospitably entertained. His name was mentioned with respect and esteem; the tide of popularity turned in his favor. As the spring drew near Lord Earle became anxious for his daughters to make their debut in the great world. They could have no better chaperon than his own mother. Lady Helena was speaking to him one morning of their proposed journey, when Lord Earle suddenly interrupted her.

"Mother," he said, "where are all your jewels? I never see you wearing any."

"I put them all away," said Lady Earle, "when your father died. I shall never wear them again. The Earle jewels are always worn by the wife of the reigning lord, not by the widow of his predecessor. Those jewels are not mine."

"Shall we look them over?" asked Ronald. "Some of them might be reset for Beatrice and Lillian."

Lady Helena rang for her maid, and the heavy cases of jewellery were brought down. Beatrice was in raptures with them, and her sister smiled at her admiration.

The jewels might have sufficed for a King's ransom; the diamonds were of the first water; the rubies flashed crimson; delicate pearls gleamed palely upon their velvet beds; there were emeralds of priceless value. One of the most beautiful and costly jewels was an entire suite of opals intermixed with small diamonds. "These," said Lord Earle, raising the precious stones in his hands, "are of immense value. Some of the finest opals ever seen are in this necklace; they were taken from the crown of an Indian Prince, and bequeathed to one of our ancestors. So much is said about the unlucky stone—the *pierre du malheur*, as the French call the opal—that I did not care so much for them."

"Give me the opals, papa," said Beatrice, laughing; "I have no superstitious fears about them. Bright and beautiful jewels always seemed to me one of the necessities of life. I prefer diamonds, but these opals are magnificent."

She held out her hands, and for the first time Lord Earle saw the opal ring upon her finger. He caught the pretty white hand in his own.

"That is a beautiful ring," he said. "Those opals are splendid. Who gave it to you, Beatrice?"

The question came upon her suddenly like a deadly shock; she had forgotten all about the ring, and wore it only from habit.

For a moment her heart seemed to stand still and her senses to desert her. Then with a self-possession worthy of a better cause, Beatrice looked up into her father's face with a smile.

"It was given to me at the Elms," she said, so simply that the same thought crossed the mind of her three listeners—that it had been given by Dora, and her daughter did not like to say so.

Lord Earle looked on in proud delight while his beautiful daughters chose the jewels they liked best. The difference in taste struck and amused him. Beatrice chose diamonds, fiery rubies, purple amethysts; Lillian cared for nothing but the pretty pale pearls and bright emeralds. "Some of these settings are very old-fashioned," said Lord Earle. "We will have new designs from Hunt & Roskill. They must be reset before you go to London."

The first thing Beatrice did was to take off the opal ring and look it away. She trembled still from the shock of her father's question. The fatal secret vexed her. How foolish she had been to risk so much for a few stolen hours of happiness—for praise and flattery—she could not say for love!

The time so anxiously looked for came at last. Lord Earle took possession of his town mansion, and his daughters prepared for their debut.

It was in every respect a successful one. People were in raptures with the beautiful sisters, both so charming—yet so unlike. Beatrice, brilliant and glowing, her magnificent face haunting those who saw it like a beautiful dream—Lillian fair and graceful, as unlike her sister as is a lily to a rose.

They soon became the fashion. No ball or soiree, no dance or concert, was considered complete without them. Artists sketched them together as "Lily and Rose," "Night and Morning," "Sunlight and Moonlight." Poets indited sonnets to them, friends and admirers thronged around them. As Beatrice said, with a deep-drawn sigh of perfect contentment, "This is life"—and she reveled in it.

The same year the Earl of Airle attained his majority, and became the centre of all fashionable interest. Whether he would marry and whom he would be likely to marry, were two questions that interested every mother and daughter in Belgravia. There had not been such an eligible *parti* for many years. The savings of a long minority alone amounted to a splendid fortune.

The young Earl had vast estates in Scotland. Lynton Hall and Craig Castle, two of the finest seats in England, were his. His mansion in Belgravia was the envy of all who saw it. Young, almost fabulously wealthy, singularly generous and amiable, the young Earl of Airle was the centre of at least half a hundred matrimonial plots; but he was not easily and true in woman the Earl was always searching for but as yet had not found.

On all sides he had heard of the beauty

of Lord Earle's daughters but it did not interest him. He had been hearing of, seeing, and feeling disappointed in beautiful women for some years. Many people made a point of meeting the "new beauties," but he gave himself no particular trouble. They were like every one else, he supposed.

One morning, having nothing else to do, Lord Airle went to a *fete* given in the beautiful grounds of Lady Downham. He went early, intending to remain only a short time. He found but few guests had arrived; after paying the proper amount of homage to Lady Downham, the young Earl wandered off into the grounds.

It was all very pretty and pleasant, but he had seen the same thing before, and was rather tired of it. The day was more Italian than English, bright and sunny, the sky blue, the air clear and filled with fragrance, the birds singing as they do sing under bright warm skies.

Flags were flying from numerous tents, bands of music were stationed in different parts of the grounds, the fountains played merrily in the sunlit air. Lord Airle walked mechanically on, bowing in reply to the salutations he received.

A pretty little bower, a perfect thicket of roses, caught his attention; from it one could see all over the lake, with its gay pleasure boats. Lord Airle sat down, believing himself to be quite alone; but, before he had removed a large bough that interfered with the full perfection of the view, he heard voices on the other side of the thick sheltering rose-bower.

He listened involuntarily, for one of the voices was clear and pure, the other more richly musical than any he had ever heard—at times sweet as the murmur of the cushat dove, and again ringing joyously and brightly.

"I hope we shall not have to wait here long, Lillian," the blithe voice was saying. "Lady Helena promised to take us on the lake."

"It is very pleasant," was the reply; "but you always like to be in the very centre of gaiety."

"Yes," said Beatrice; "I have had enough solitude and quiet to last me for life. Ah, Lillian, this is all delightful. You think so, but do not admit it honestly as I do."

There was a faint, musical laugh, and then the sweet voice resumed:

"I am charmed, Lillian, with this London life; this is worth calling life—every moment is a golden one. If there is a drawback, it consists in not being able to speak one's mind."

"What do you mean?" asked Lillian. "Do you not understand?" was the reply. "Lady Helena is always talking to me about cultivating what she calls 'elegant repose.' Poor, dear grandmamma! her perfect idea of good manners seems to me to be a simple absence—in society, at least—of all emotion and all feeling. I, for one, do not admire the *nil admirari* system."

"I am sure Lady Helena admires you, Bee," said her sister.

"Yes," was the careless reply. "Only imagine, Lillian, yesterday, when Lady Cairn told me some story about a favorite young friend of hers, the tears came to my eyes. I could not help it, although the drawing-room was full. Lady Helena told me I should repress all outward emotion. Soon after, when Lord Dolchester told me a ridiculous story about Lady Everton, I laughed—heartyly, I must confess, though not loudly—and she looked at me. I shall never accomplish 'elegant repose.'"

"You would not be half so charming if you did," replied her sister. "Then it is so tempting to say at times what one really thinks! I cannot resist it. When Lady Everton tells me, with that tiresome simper of hers, that she really wonders at herself, I long to tell her other people do the same thing. I should enjoy, for once, the luxury of telling Mrs. St. John that people flatter her, and then laugh at her affectation. It is a luxury to speak the truth at all times, is it not, Lily? I detest everything false, even a false word; therefore I fear Lady Helena will never quite approve of my manner."

"You are so frank and fearless! At the Elms, do you remember how every one seemed to feel that you would say just the right thing at the right time?" asked Lillian. "Do not mention that place," replied Beatrice; "this life is so different. I like it so much, Lily—all the brightness and gaiety. I feel good and contented now. I was always restless and longing for life; now I have all I wish for."

There was a pause then, Lord Airle longed to see who the speakers were—who was the girl that spoke such frank, bright words—that loved truth, and hated all things false—what kind of face accompanied that voice. Suddenly the young Earl remembered that he was listening, and he started in horror from his seat. He pushed aside the clustering roses. At first he saw nothing but the golden blossoms of a drooping laburnum; then, a little farther on, he saw a fair head bending over some fragrant flowers; then a face so beautiful, so perfect, that something like a cry of surprise came from Lord Airle's lips.

He had seen many beauties, but nothing like this queenly young girl. Her dark bright eyes were full of fire and light; the long lashes swept her cheek, the proud, beautiful lips, so haughty in repose, so sweet when smiling, were perfect in shape. From the noble brow a waving mass of dark hair rippled over a white neck and shapely shoulders. It was a face to think and dream of, peerless in its vivid, exquisite coloring and charmingly molded features. He hardly noticed the fair haired girl.

"Who can she be?" thought Lord Airle. "I believed that I had seen every beautiful woman in London."

Satisfied with having seen what kind of a face accompanied the voice, the young Earl left the pretty rose thicket. His friends must have thought him slightly deranged. He went about asking every one, "Who is here to-day?" Amongst others, he saluted Lord Dolchester with that question.

"I can scarcely tell you," replied his Lordship. "I am somewhat in a puzzle. If you want to know who is the queen of the *fete*, I can tell you. It is Lord Earle's daughter, Miss Beatrice Earle. She is over there, see, with Lady Downham."

Looking in the direction indicated, Lord Airle saw the face that haunted him.

"Is that Miss Earle?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," said Lord Dolchester, with a gay laugh; "and if I were young and un-

fettered, she would not be Miss Earle much longer."

### CHAPTER XXIV.

Lord Airle gazed long and earnestly at the beautiful girl who looked so utterly unconscious of the admiration she excited.

"I must ask Lady Downham to introduce me," said Lillian with a difficult subject. He laughed, talked, danced, walked, and rode, as society wished him to do; but no one had touched his heart, or even his fancy. Lord Airle was heart-whole, and there seemed no prospect of his ever being anything else. Lady Constance Tachbrook, the prettiest, daintiest coquette in London, brought all her artillery of fascination into play, but without success. The beautiful brunette, Flora Cranbourne, had laid a wager that, in the course of two waltzes, she would extract three compliments from him but she failed in the attempt. Lord Airle was pronounced incorrigible.

The fact was that his lordship had been sensibly brought up. He intended to marry when he could find some one to love him for himself and not for his fortune. This ideal of all that was beautiful, noble, me, he said to himself, wondering whether the proud face would smile upon, and, if she carried into practice her favorite theory of saying what she thought, what she would say to him.

Lady Downham smiled when the young Earl made his request.

"I have been besieged by gentlemen requesting introductions to Miss Earle," she said. "Contrary to your general rule, Lord Airle, you go with the crowd."

He would have gone anywhere for one word from those perfect lips. Lady Downham led him to the spot where Beatrice stood, and in a few courteous words introduced him to her.

Lord Airle was celebrated for his amiable, pleasing manner. He always knew what to say and how to say it; but when those magnificent eyes looked into his own the young Earl stood silent and abashed. In vain he tried confusedly to mutter a few words; his face flushed, and Beatrice looked at him in wonder. Could this man gazing so ardently at her be the impenetrable Lord Airle?

He managed at length to say something about the beauty of the grounds and the brightness of the day. Plainly as eyes could speak, hers asked, had he nothing to say?

He lingered by her side, charmed and fascinated by her grace; she talked to Lillian and to Lady Helena; she received the homage offered to her so unconsciously of his presence and his regard that Lord Airle was piqued. He was not accustomed to be overlooked.

"Do you never grow tired of flowers and *fetes*, Miss Earle?" he asked at length. "No," replied Beatrice, "I could never grow tired of flowers—who could? As for *fetes*, I have seen few, and have liked each one better than the last."

"Perhaps your life has not been like mine, spent amongst them," he said. "I have lived amongst flowers," she replied, "but not amongst *fetes*; they have all the charm of novelty for me."

"I should like to enjoy them as you do," he said. "I wish you would teach me, Miss Earle."

She laughed gaily, and the sound of that laugh, like a sweet silver chime, charmed Lord Airle still more.

He found out the prettiest pleasure-boat, and persuaded Beatrice to let him row her across the lake. He gathered a beautiful water-lily for her. When they landed he found out a seat in the prettiest spot and placed her there.

Her simple gay manner delighted him. He had never met any one like her. She did not blush, or look conscious, or receive his attentions with the half-fluttered sentimental air common to most young ladies of his acquaintance.

She never appeared to remember that he was Lord Airle, nor sought by any artifice to keep him near her. The bright sunny hours seemed to pass rapidly as a dream. Long before the day ended the young Earl said to himself that he had met his fate, that if it took years to win her he would count them well spent—that in all the wide world she was the wife for him.

Lord Earle was somewhat amused by the solicitude the young nobleman showed in making his acquaintance and consulting his tastes. After Lady Downham's *fete* he called regularly at the house. Lady Helena liked him, but could hardly decide which of her grandchildren attracted him.

The fastidious young Earl, who had smiled at the idea of love and had disappointed all the mothers in Belgravia, found himself a victim at last. He was diffident of his own powers, hardly daring to hope that he should succeed in winning the most beautiful and gifted girl in London. He was timid in her presence, and took refuge with Lillian. All fashionable London was taken by surprise when Lord Airle threw open his magnificent house, and, under the auspices of his aunt, Lady Leecombe, issued invitations for a grand ball.

Many were the conjectures, and great the excitement. Lord Earle smiled as he showed Lady Helena the cards of invitation.

"Of course you will go," he said. "We have no engagements for that day. See that the girls look their best, mother."

He felt very proud of his daughters—Lillian looking so fair and sweet in her white silk dress and favorite pearls; Beatrice, like a queen, in a cloud of white lace, with coquettish dashes of crimson. The Earle diamonds shone in her dark hair, clasped the fair white throat, and encircled the beautiful arms. A magnificent pomegranate blossom lay in the bosom of her dress, and she carried a bouquet of white lilies mixed with scarlet verbenas.

The excitement as to the ball had been great. It seemed like a step in the right direction at last. The great question was, with whom would Lord Airle open the ball? Every girl was on the *qui vive*.

The question was soon decided. When Beatrice Earle entered the room, Lord Airle went straight to meet her, and solicited her hand for the first dance. She did not know how much was meant by that one action.

Then she saw—and it struck her with surprise—how Lord Airle, so courted and run after, sought her out. She saw smiles upon friendly faces, and heard her name mingled with his.

(To be continued.)