

TO THE BITTER END.

A Tale of Two Lives.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THANK GOD THAT HE HAS GONE!"

For some time Lord Clanavon stood with the paper in his hand doubtful how to act. Then he quietly dropped it again where he had found it and strolled away to another part of the room. When Mrs. Smith entered, a few minutes later, with the luncheon tray, he did not even mention the subject.

"Not at all an unpleasant room, this," he remarked, as she commenced setting out the things; "but where did my father sleep when he came down here?"

He was watching her very closely, and he could detect a slight uneasiness in her manner as she answered, after a moment's hesitation:

"In here, sir. There is a sort of chair bedstead stands in my room, and he used to have that brought here. If you are spending the night here, my lord—"

"I am not," he interrupted. "I shall be leaving this afternoon."

It was impossible for Mrs. Smith to altogether conceal her relief. Lord Clanavon noticed her changed aspect, but he made no remark.

"This is a very queer old place Mrs. Smith," he remarked.

"It is, my lord, very old-fashioned, and I'm sure the damp is something awful. In the wet weather I'm most of the time down with rheumatics. For them who's not used to such places it may be most unhealthy."

He turned away to hide a slight smile. "I'm not surprised to hear it, Mrs. Smith," he said gravely. "By the bye, when I was a youngster I used to hear some queer stories about the place—or was it my fancy? Aren't there some secret rooms in this tower and a passage leading somewhere or other? I fancy I used to hear my father talk about them."

He had strolled away to the window, but had carefully placed himself opposite a small mirror. In it he saw the sudden start which had set all the ribbons in her cap rustling, and watched the deadly pallor creep into her wrinkled face. It was enough for him. He forbore to turn around, and stood idly gazing out of the window, as though the matter were of small interest to him.

"It must be—a mistake, my lord. I have never heard of any."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Very likely. If you have never heard of any it must have been. Well I'll have some luncheon now, and then finish looking through these papers. I expect a fly or carriage of some sort here about four o'clock. Will you let me know when it is here, and bring me a cup of tea?"

"Certainly, my lord. Is there anything else I can do now?"

"Nothing, thank you, Mrs. Smith. Your chickens look very good, and the air has given me an appetite. Where did this claret come from?"

"Your father had it sent here, my lord, several years ago. There is a great deal of it in the cellar."

"I'm very glad to hear it," he answered, emptying his glass. "I think I'll have it sent back to London, as I don't intend coming down here again. It's too good to lose sight of. There's nothing else at present, Mrs. Smith."

"Very good, my lord. I'm sorry you'll find there's no bell; but I'll come for the tray in half an hour."

She left him alone, closing the door carefully after her. When she returned he had finished his lunch and was seated once more at the writing-table. This time, as he appeared to be busy, there was no conversation between them. She cleared the things away in silence and departed.

He waited until she had got out of hearing before he moved. Then he lit a cigar, and, opening the door, walked out into the corridor connecting the tower with the main building. A few yards down it there was a great fissure in the inland wall. He leaned over it, and folding his arms upon the stonework looked thoughtfully at the tower.

Two things struck him about it: First, that taking into account the small size of the room which he had just quitted, the walls must either be of extraordinary thickness, or there must be some hollow space between; secondly, that from its great height, and the fact of the only room in it being right at the top, it had probably been built for a watch-tower. The last theory made the possibility of the existence of any secret rooms about the place somewhat unlikely. Yet it seemed a very feasible one, for a strong light burning in that little chamber at the top of the tower would cast its reflection far over the sea which rolled in to its very base.

If there had been time, and if he could have been sure that Mrs. Smith was not watching him, he would have liked by some means to go down on the beach below, and examine the tower from its base. But glancing at his watch, he saw that there was scarcely time for this, so he determined to put the plan which he had previously determined into execution. He walked back into the room, and, throwing away his cigar, carefully examined the walls on the north side. He tried them inch by inch all the way along without result. They were perfectly solid stone and mortar. He looked all around the fireplace; it was even more unpromising. Then he tried the walls on the other side, though he hoped for a little from these, for from the window he could tell that there was not much space for a passage of any sort between the inside and outside of the wall. Finally he concluded his search with a shrug of the shoulders, and confessed himself beaten—for the time.

He lit another cigar, and sitting down in the easy chair, once more read through the little packet of letters which he had secured. They told him so little, and yet so much. He could scarcely see, now that he had them, how to act. It was all vague and unsatisfactory. In his heart he knew that he was sorry that he had found them. It was a chapter of his father's life which had better been kept closed forever. Had it not been for that marriage certificate—had there been mention of an angry father or brother, of the disgrace which, save for that slip of paper, he might have brought upon that dead woman and her family—then it might have been possible to connect this incident with his father's murder, and thus he might have hunted down the assassin. But as it was it seemed to him impossible to do so. This was an episode, a startling episode, but it had

a finite ending. It was finished and done with. There was no point in it which he could lay hold of and follow out with any hope of its leading him to a definite clue.

Four o'clock came, and soon afterward Mrs. Smith knocked at the door and entered, carrying a small bag.

"The fly from Mewlton has arrived, my lord, and I have brought you your tea."

He drank it, then carefully locked up the writing-desk, and prepared to depart.

"I shall send down here some time, Mrs. Smith," he said, "for the papers in that desk. I will let you know when. Or perhaps I may write and ask you to forward them. You will be able to do that?"

"Certainly, my lord. I would use great care."

He drew on his overcoat, and then swung the key thoughtfully backward and forward upon his finger.

"Perhaps," he said, "until I do so I had better take the key and let Mr. Brudnell have it."

She seemed a little disturbed, and there was an anxious gleam in her eyes. But she struggled to hide it.

"It would be perfectly safe here, my lord, where you found it. I would not let it out of my sight."

"I don't doubt it, Mrs. Smith," he said, walking by her side down the corridor; "but lawyers are very particular sort of people, you know, and there are important papers in that desk. I think, in fact, I know that Mr. Brudnell would prefer having the key himself."

"Very good, my lord." They passed through the gallery and the dreary succession of uninhabited and uninhabitable rooms and out into the yard, where a closed fly, drawn by a pair of nondescript—one pony and a horse—was waiting. Lord Alceston took his seat at once, and made his adieux to Mrs. Smith from the window.

"Good-day, Mrs. Smith. Much obliged for your attention."

"Good-day, my lord, and thank you."

She dropped him an old-fashioned courtesy and stood with a very forced smile on her lips, till the carriage drove off. As it vanished her whole appearance changed. She had stood watching the vehicle with a fixed eager gaze, which changed the moment it finally disappeared into a look of intense relief. The tears glistened in her eyes and her lips trembled. It had been a great strain on her, but, thank God! it was over. He had gone. Thank God for it!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SPRING DOOR.

The carriage which was conveying Lord Alceston back toward more civilized regions had scarcely proceeded more than a couple of miles when its occupant thrust his head out of the window and called to the driver to stop. The man pulled up at once and turned round to find that his lordship had dismounted and was standing by his side.

"Look here, my man," he said slowly, "do you want to earn a sovereign?"

"I shouldn't make no objection to that, your lordship," answered the man, touching his hat with a broad grin of anticipation. By his accent and readiness of speech he was evidently no provincial.

"Very well, then, listen to me, and I'll tell you how," Lord Alceston continued. "I've altered my mind about going away to-day. Don't ask any questions, but just do as I tell you. Drive back to the inn, and simply say that you were not wanted, but are to come to the castle for me to-morrow morning. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, your lordship. Am I to drive you back to the castle now, or leave you here?"

"You are to leave me here. I shall return on foot."

"Very good, your lordship," the man answered, gathering up his reins.

"You can go."

"Very good, your lordship."

"Then why don't you start?"

The man touched his hat and smiled insinuatingly.

"There was a small amount to be earned, your lordship."

"And you want it in advance, do you?" Lord Alceston remarked, smiling and feeling in his pocket.

"Well, it's like this, your lordship," the man said, confidentially, "they might not put me on the job to-morrow, and then, you see—"

Lord Alceston handed him up the coin.

"There you are, then. You're no fool, I see. Remember to keep a still tongue in your head."

"There ain't no fear, your lordship. I knows wot I'm to say, and no more. I wish your lordship good-afternoon."

The man drove off and left Lord Alceston standing in the middle of the road. It was barely five o'clock, but it was already almost dark. Buttoning up his coat, he turned round, and with the wind in his teeth, started back toward the castle. In about half an hour he had reached the side of the cliff fronting the bay, immediately above the cottages, and about a quarter of a mile from the castle, which was now in full view.

He looked first at the tower. There was no light there. He drew a quick breath of disappointment, although it was only what he had expected. He looked around him, and choosing a flat rock, a little sheltered from the wind, he sat down and lit a cigar.

An hour passed, two hours—three hours. Lord Alceston was smoking his last cigar, his feet were numb with cold, and his patience was almost exhausted. Suddenly he jumped to his feet with a quick exclamation. A light had suddenly appeared in the dark outline before him, and twinkling unsteadily for a minute or two had settled down to burn with a clear, steady glow.

He threw away his cigar and watched it with a peculiar smile. There could be no possible doubt about it. It came from the chamber in the tower, the key of which was at that very moment in his pocket.

Mrs. Smith was sitting alone in her room, half parlor, half kitchen, with her eyes closed and her hands idle in her lap. Before her on the oaken table was an open Bible, a lamp, and her knitting, but neither had received very much attention from her. She was an old woman, and for her it had been a terrible day. The suspense had wearied her, and now that it was over she was feeling the strain. But she was very grateful.

She felt that she had reason to be, and she was genuinely grateful.

Hark! What was that? Surely not a clicking of the latch! It must have been the wind—a mouse. Hark! Was that not a footstep on the stone flags? Some one had entered the house—was closing the door. Oh, God, if it should be he, come back!

She clutched the side of her chair, and slowly opened her eyes. Before her, his hair tossed by the wind and the rain streaming from his clothes, stood Lord Alceston, with pale set face, and holding something in his hand which flashed and gleamed in the dancing firelight. She looked at him, dumb, her eyes glazed with an unutterable horror and aghast limbs shaking. It was an awful moment. The perspiration stood in great beads on her dry, wrinkled forehead. Often afterward she wondered that the strings of her life had not snapped with the tension. It was enough to kill her.

His voice broke the spell which had numbed all her senses.

"Mrs. Smith," he said, sternly, "you have lied to me about that room. There is some one in there now. I am going to solve this mystery for myself."

Consciousness had come to her like a flash. She knew what it was he proposed to do; she foresaw the result. She saw the stern, set look in his face and the barrel of the revolver in his hand. It was the face of a man undaunted, indomitable, fearless. Yet she tried her best.

She threw herself on her knees before him. She grovelled at his feet.

"My lord," she cried, "listen to me! Be warned! As sure as there is a God in Heaven I swear to you that you will repent it every day of your life if you do this thing!"

He looked at her curiously, but utterly unmoved.

"Though I face death itself I shall go to that room and discover its occupant," he said quietly. "You have done ill in keeping this thing secret from me, whatever it be, and if you have made my house the refuge of criminals you shall answer for it, old woman though you are. Get up. You do no good there."

She sprang toward him and would her arms around his neck to hold him back. He disengaged himself as gently as he could, but still with some little force. With a shriek which rang through the bare rooms and empty ruined corridors and awoke a thousand strange echoes at every corner, she sank back upon the bare stone floor fainting.

He hesitated, but it was only for a second. She must take her chance. He could do little for her if he stayed, and if the sound of her cry had reached the tower he might find the occupant fled. Catching up the lamp in his left hand, he hurried away along the wide gallery.

Twice he lost his way and had to retrace his steps, and many times he stumbled over the startled rats and nearly fell. At last he reached the ruined corridors leading to the tower, and his heart gave a great leap. He strode along with the key ready in his hand. When he reached the part where there was a great gap in the side and roof the wind blew his lamp out. He threw it away over his side, and heard it go crashing down below. With his free hand he drew his revolver from his pocket and hurried on.

He reached the door and thrust the key in the lock. It was stiff and creaked in the turning. There was a sound from inside like a sharp report. Lord Alceston, with a final wrench, threw the door open and stepped quickly inside.

A lamp was burning on the table which had been his father's and a book lay open beside it. There was a strong smell of tobacco in the room, and there were other evidences of recent occupation. But the room had no occupant. It was empty.

Lord Alceston looked eagerly around for some clue as to the means by which the mysterious occupant had escaped him. Suddenly a certain part of the floor attracted his notice. The carpet was all disarranged and two of the oaken beams were aslant from a certain point, as though on a hinge. He stooped down to examine them closer and saw at once that they formed a trap-door. He lifted it, and below was an iron ladder leading into darkness as black as night.

He did not hesitate for more than a moment. Then slipping his revolver into his pocket and grasping the sides of the ladder with both hands, he commenced the descent. Five, six, seven, eight steps he counted. Then it began to get a little lighter, and from the ninth he stepped off on to some sort of flooring. There was no sound, no sign of any one else being near.

He struck a match and looked curiously about him. He was in a chamber similar in shape to, only smaller than, the one which he had just quitted, but windowless, and with no signs of ever having been regularly used as a human habitation. The walls were damp and spotted with fungi and huge cobwebs, the floor was rough and uneven, and a vault-like, musty smell filled the place. The only light came from a small opening in the wall on the seaward side, which seemed also to afford sole means of ventilation.

A little heap in the far corner attracted Lord Alceston's attention, and he made his way carefully toward it. Unfit though the place was, it had evidently been used by some one as a temporary lodging, for here in the driest portion were a heap of bed-clothes, linen, and a few other articles bundled together, as though in great haste, with the view of hiding them. Directly he saw them Lord Alceston knew that the object of his search could not be far away.

He struck another match, and looked around to see what means of exit the place afforded. Almost opposite him was a small wooden door, rotten with age and tottering on its hinges. Some efforts seemed to have been made to strengthen it, for sprung iron hooks were roughly tied up with rope, but there was neither lock nor bolt to it.

Lord Alceston looked at it for a minute, and then took a quick step forward and lit another match. There was no doubt about it. The door was shaking slightly backward and forward, as though held on the other side by an unsteady hand. Drawing a step nearer, and listening, he could hear a faint, low sound—the sound of an exhausted and panting man struggling to hold his breath.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH.

It did not take Lord Alceston long to make up his mind as to what course to adopt. Dropping the match which he had been holding upon the ground, he strode up to the door and leaned his shoulder against it.

"Whoever you are," he cried, "you had

better come out and let me see you! If you don't I shall burst the door!"

There was no answer, save a half-stifled moan. Lord Alceston planted his feet firmly upon the ground and prepared for the struggle.

"I warn you to stand aside!" he called out. "I am going to have this door open!"

Again there was no answer. Lord Alceston wasted no more time in parleyings. Setting his teeth, he commenced the struggle.

He did not find the task of overcoming his unseen adversary quite so easy as he had expected. For nearly a minute he put forth his whole strength, but his feet slipped more than once on the damp slippery ground, and when on the eve of success he had lost his advantage and had been obliged to make a fresh start. The labored breath and groans of his adversary told him that he was in sore distress, but nevertheless he held on, and though the door creaked and trembled with the strain put upon it, it never budged an inch.

Breathless himself, Lord Alceston relinquished his efforts, and after a moment's consideration changed his tactics. Stepping back into the room, he took a few yards' run, and charged the door with irresistible force. The result was an unexpected one. The door went down before him with a crash, and he, not being prepared for such an easy victory, overbalanced himself and fell heavily upon it.

He picked himself up at once, unhurt, but a trifle dizzy. The reason of his fall was obvious. The opposing force which had been holding the door up had vanished. His adversary had fled.

He stood quite still for a moment, leaning forward into the darkness and listening intently. At first it seemed to him that the silence was as the silence of the grave; then as his senses grew a little more accustomed to his surroundings, he could faintly hear the sound of stealthy retreating footsteps.

His first impulse was to leap forward in the direction from which the sound came, and follow it in blind pursuit. Then he hesitated, for he was in black darkness, unrelieved by a single gleam of light. Feeling hastily in his pocket, he found his match-box—fortunately full—and, striking a light, held it high over his head.

He glanced around in hasty curiosity. The faint, flickering light was just sufficient to show him the bare, damp walls of a winding passage about six feet broad and scarcely so high—nothing else.

After a momentary glance he threw the match down, and stooping low to avoid knocking his head against the roof, he turned and hurried in the direction of the fleeting footsteps, now almost indistinguishable.

It was a chase which he remembered all his life—and with reason. More than once he missed his footing on the wet, slimy earth and fell forward on his hands. But the sound, now plainly to be heard, of the hurrying footsteps in front was enough to spur him on again, heedless of his aching limbs and cut hands. He ran into the jagged walls at sharp curves, bruising his face and arms, and at times he felt almost choked by the noxious air. But he never dreamed of giving up the chase. So far from that, every fall seemed to make him more eager and to lend him renewed strength.

Beneath a somewhat careless and insouciant manner, acquired during his travels abroad, Lord Alceston was a thorough Englishman, and was possessed of a bulldog tenacity of purpose. All this part of him was aroused now. Anger and surprise had become merged in another and a stronger feeling. There had been a conspiracy to deceive him! His property was being made the refuge of one who dared not live in the light of day—who was presumably a criminal; and, most heinous offence of all, his permission had not been asked! The shelter of his roof had been taken advantage of by stealth. Lord Alceston was very angry indeed. Danger and discomfort were alike forgotten. There was only one thought in his mind, and one purpose; and he meant to accomplish it.

Suddenly, the intense vault-like stillness of the place was broken by a strange, awful sound reaching him, faintly at first, but increasing in volume at every step forward he took. There is a sensation akin to fear, yet apart from cowardice—awe. Lord Alceston felt it as he paused and listened with bated breath. At first it sounded like the low rumbling of a threatened earthquake—like the thunderous splitting up of hills and mountains and the parting asunder of the solid earth. He stood quite still for a moment, listening intently. The ground beneath his feet was soft and wet; the walls were glistening with drops of wet which seemed to be oozing out from them. He put his foot on a soft, pulpy substance, and saw that it was a starfish clinging to a mass of dull brown, dank seaweed. Then the truth flashed in upon him, and he understood at once that low rumbling sound which seemed to make the walls of the passage shake and groan—this underground passage must lead to the sea.

He pushed on again without hesitation. Drowned in the monotonous roar which was singing now in his ears, he had no longer the sound of the footsteps in front to encourage him. But a few more yards along the passage brought him within measurable distance of the end of his quest. The passage contracted into an opening scarcely wide enough for a man to creep through. Without a moment's pause he crawled through. Then he saw that he could go but a little further, for scarcely a dozen yards in front of him was another wider opening, like the mouth of a cave, and beyond there was the sea.

Lord Alceston stood upright, and looked eagerly around him. In the dusky twilight it was hard to make out at all the shapeless objects which loomed about him. By degrees, however, as his eyes grew more accustomed to the light, they stood out clearer, and he began to take in his surroundings. He was in a cave, a low, sea-stained cave, terminating in the aperture by which he had entered. The sides were dripping with wet and the ground, strewn with seaweed and dark puddles, showed him that at high tide the sea entered. Several huge mounds of rock jutted up by his side in queer, fantastic shapes. Save for the dripping of the water into the puddles from the roof and sides of the cave, and the more distant ebb and flow of the sea, a deep, gloomy silence seemed to brood over the place. Nowhere was there any sign of any human being.

He had already taken one hasty step forward toward the entrance when a curious phenomenon presented itself. From behind one of the masses of rock, on his left-

hand side, he became suddenly aware of a pair of bright, glistening eyes fastened upon him. At first he was almost inclined to think that they were starfish, but while he hesitated the dark, thin figure of a man stole out from behind the shelter of the rock and darted toward the aperture of the secret passage. Before he had taken half a dozen steps, however, Lord Alceston's right arm was wound around his neck, and he felt himself lifted bodily from his feet.

An unearthly cry rang out into the silence, and was echoed back from the roof and sides of the cave till it died away in a plaintive wail—a cry which seemed to come from a soul in agony, rather than from any mortal being in physical fear. Lord Alceston shuddered, but he only tightened his grasp.

"Out into the light!" he cried, fiercely dragging his captive toward the entrance of the cave. "Let me see the man who has led me this mad chase!"

The man sank down upon the ground as though exhausted.

"For the love of God and for your own everlasting peace of mind, Lord Alceston," he moaned, "leave me here! I swear by everything that is holy in heaven or earth that it will be better for you not to look upon my face. Let me go! Oh, let me go!"

"Not I!" cried Lord Alceston, peering through the twilight in a vain attempt to distinguish the features of his captive. "Get up, and come outside, or by heaven I'll carry you."

"Listen to me, Lord Alceston!" cried the other in a weak, hollow tone. "There is no exit from this cave, and as the tide comes in that passage," pointing backward, "is impassable. Go back quickly, or you will be too late, and leave me here. Death will be welcome to me."

Lord Alceston made no answer, but reaching down he lifted up the crouching form like a baby, and stooping low down he carried him to the entrance of the cave and out into the fading daylight. Then he set him down.

"Get up, and don't lie there grovelling like a woman," he said sternly. "Get up, and tell me what you mean by this strange behavior, and who you are."

The man did not move. Lord Alceston stooped down on one knee, and tore asunder the interlaced hands, which covered the man's thin face. Then he let them go as if they had stung him, and staggered back.

"Neillan!" he cried. "My God!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A TERRIBLE REVENGE.

Ingeniously Inhuman Conduct With Which He Charges a Farmer.

A Forsythe, Mo., despatch says:—Ten days ago Henry Sullivan, a prosperous farmer and cattle raiser of this vicinity, left home to go to a neighboring town, where he purposed buying a number of cattle. Since that time nothing was heard of him until to-day, when he walked into his home looking so haggard, unkempt, and disreputable that no one recognized him. He told a strange story of his mishaps while absent which investigation substantiates.

Some time ago, in making a deal with Charles Wilson, a farmer, Sullivan got the best of it to the extent of several thousand dollars. This so preyed upon Wilson, an eccentric bachelor, that he determined upon a fiendish revenge. In a deep canon near the road which Sullivan travelled was a large cave which no one had ever explored, and which was reputed to be the den of ferocious wild animals and venomous reptiles.

Assaulting Sullivan at a point near the cave, Wilson dragged his captive into it. Stripping him naked, he bound him firmly to a giant column and left him. Here, with the slime from the cave dripping on him and with vermin, bugs, and repulsive worms crawling over him, Sullivan spent several days of unspeakable agony and misery.

It was not his captor's plan to kill him at once. He was to die by inches. Each day he visited Sullivan, bringing with him just food enough to prolong life and to make his sufferings a thousand times worse than the agony of death. What Sullivan suffered, he says, can never be told. It was worse than the torments of hell. His fiendish captor would bring heaped-up dishes of food, and, placing it just beyond his reach, would gloat over his agony. A week of this and the prisoner was so weak and mentally such a wreck that Wilson, fearing he might die before he had satisfied his revenge, adopted milder tactics, and fed him liberally for a few days.

In one of the efforts made with revived strength Sullivan broke his bonds and fled. He found his way home and told his pitiful story to his wife, who started the authorities on the track of the inhuman Wilson. The latter has fled, and, as yet, no traces of him have been found. If he is caught no course of justice will try him.

Sullivan is a mental and physical wreck as the result of his sufferings in the cave of horrors.

GRAND AND AWFUL.

The Terrible Storm Which Swept Over Nova Scotia on Tuesday Night.

A despatch from Halifax says:—One of the most terrible electrical storms witnessed in the maritime provinces in recent times swept over the country early yesterday morning, and was repeated with even greater fury last night and this morning, demoralizing the telegraph lines. On Monday evening the thermometer was down to 38, yesterday it was 89 in the shade. The lightning storm of yesterday morning did considerable damage throughout the country. Another storm of even greater violence struck Halifax last night. At 10 o'clock a meteor-like flash darted across the sky, and broke and spread in forks in thousands of directions. At 11 o'clock a startlingly vivid flash of lightning and a roaring peal of thunder broke over the peninsula. The lightning, which seemed to move from the north-west, flashed across the harbor in vivid chains of fire, lighting up the whole harbor. About 12 o'clock an appalling sheet of flame, accompanied by a peal of awful thunder lasting some seconds, lit up the whole city and showed the Dartmouth shore quite distinctly. The rattling peals of thunder and the flashing chains of cloud fire made the scene at once appalling and magnificent. At Truro the electric lights were extinguished, and the midnight express from St. John dashed into a box car which the high wind had blown on the main line. The locomotive was wrecked, the postal car was wrecked, the whole train derailed and other damage done, but no passenger was injured. Trainmen say the view of the storm while crossing the Cobeguid mountains was a magnificent one.