A MOONLIGHT ESCAPADE.

CHAPTER VII.

The next day and the next passed by, and still Hector made no sign, and Effie suffered the unutterable tortures of suspense.

Every ring at the door, every sound of a horse's hoofs or of carriage-wheels made her heart beat faster. She started up when her maid brought her her letters in the morning, longing, yet dreading, to find one in Hector's handwriting; but no such missive appeared. She could not stay in the house, but wandered about the lawn and shrubberies like an unquiet spirit, not daring to leave the place lest Hector should come in her absence. She had to make one expedition to the pine-wood, but took an extra quantity of provisions, so as not to be obliged to go there so soon again. She managed to get the village-boy to carry rugs and blankets to the ruined cottage, and provided Joe with such literature as she thought might interest him. She roamed about the grounds all day, returning ever and anon to the house on some pretext or other, in reality to see if her lover was there.

As time wore on, Mrs. Dering spoke to her daughter. The good lady had seen at once that something was amiss, but had refrained from speaking till there seemed a real necessity for it. At last, one day when Effie came, weary and dispirited, and sank down upon the sofa, pretending to read, only to start up in a few minutes as if with the intention of going out again, Mrs. Dering began.

"Why has not Hector been here for the last few days?" she asked, as carelessly as she could. "I hope you and he have not had a quarrel."

Effie flushed deeply.

"Why do you ask mother?"

Why do I ask? My darling child, do you think your father and I have not noticed that Hector has not been here for three days? We said nothing at first, well knowing that lovers have a bad habit of quarrelling at times; but this has gone on too long, Effie. I strongly suspect that it is your fault—you have always treated poor Hector too cavalierly; and, no doubt, desperately in love though he may be, he has turned at last. If it is your fault, darling, you will have to make the first advances. Shall I write and ask him to dine here to-night?"

"Not for worlds, mother!" cried Effie, her pride aroused at once, though a moment before she would have given anything to know that she would see Hector that evening.

"But how long do you intend this estrangement to continue?" asked the perplexed mother. "I must really know more about this, Effie; it is getting serious."

"It was all my fault," said Effie, in a low tone.

She was still standing where she had turned round when her mother first spoke to her. The light from a window fell full upon her face, and the mother's heart ached to see how changed it was. Even the girl's attitude was dejected-looking as she stood there, playing nervously with the leaves of a plant on a stand beside her.

"Then in that case we must make the first advances," said Mrs. Dering more firmly.

"Oh, pray, mother, spare me that humiliation!" cried Effie imploringly. "I feel sure that Hector will never forgive me. He would only refuse your invitation if you send one."

"But, my dear child, is the engagement broken off?"

"I suppose so," said Effie.

"You only suppose so! Effie, don't make me angry with my little girl when she seems so unhappy. You know, my child, that you were formally engaged to marry Hector? the whole county knows it. If you have agreed that you are unsuited to each other, it is better to come to an understanding at once. Shall your father go over and see Hector? For Heaven's sake, child, speak—say something! Let me have some idea of how matters stand between you."

Thus adjured, Effie murmured out something about a quarrel with Hector the last morning he had been there.

"I am sure that it will never be made up, mother," she said, trying to steady her voice. "I am not wholly to blame; Hector was too hasty, I think. But there is no use in saying anything more about it."

"You mean to say that you have really broken off your engagement in this calm way?" cried Mrs. Dering, in utter astonishment.

"Call it anything you like, mother," said Effie wearily. "But, darling, I can't bear to talk of it just yet."

And she turned to quit the room.

"One moment, Effie," called out Mrs. Dering after her. "Your father and I cannot let matters remain thus. We formally gave our consent to your engagement with Hector Lyndhurst. You and he cannot quietly decide to go back from it without a word to your parents. I shall send your father over to-morrow to ask Hector what it all means."

The girl flushed crimson.

"Must that be, mother? Would it not seem like trying to get him back?"

"He is not likely to accuse us of doing that," replied Mrs. Dering, drawing herself up proudly. "The Derings are not in the habit of setting aside conventionalities, or of running after men for their daughters. You can safely leave your honour in your father's hands, darling."

Effie left the room, sick at heart, but with a faint hope springing up in her breast, or, if not a hope, a feeling that it would be better to know the worst. She wondered what excuse Hector would give for his conduct. He would be loyal, she knew; but would he think it better for her pride that the blame of the estrangement should lie on her? He could not deliberately tell Mr. Dering that he had met his daughter walking with another man in the middle of the night. What, then, could he say?

She fondly hoped that his great love for her would by this time have conquered his jealousy, and that he would ask for an interview with her. She would only too gladly meet him.

She could hardly endure her own company while Mr. Dering was absent on his mission. She kept running to her room, which commanded a view of the avenue, to catch the first glimpse of the returning dog-cart. How terribly she had longed to see Hector seated by her father's side she only knew when Mr. Dering came into view alone. All was over then—really and truly over for ever! Had matters been arranged, Hector would have rushed over at once to her. Well, if he chose to give her up for so slight a cause, his love must have been much less than she deemed it. For a moment anger overcame her misery. She determined to show that she could care as little for this sad finale to their engagement as her ex-lover did. Not even her parents should know the despair she felt at the thought that he had left her for ever.

Like a true woman, she went to the glass to see if there were traces of tears on her cheeks, arranged her hair in its most becoming fashion, and ran down-stairs to luncheon gaily humming a tune.

Her father met her as she was crossing the hall, and looked at her in some surprise. He felt relieved at the sight of her, for he was dreading the effect of the news he had to communicate. This was not the time to tell it however, and they all talked of the most indifferent subjects during luncheon, Effie bearing he share in the conversation.

After the meal was over he took her into the library and related the substance of his interview with Hector Lyndhurst. It was merely this. Hector had said that he had found that Effie did not care for him as he had fondly imagined; that the engagement was off; and that Mr. Dering had better question his daughter, as Hector left the matter in her hands. He was confident that Mr. Dering would not press Effie to say more than she wished. In the meantime he hoped that this would not diminish the friendship between himself and the Derings, and that, when he and Effie could meet without embarrassment, he might be received as usual at the Manor. For the present, he was leaving the country and going to shoot big game in the East.

"And, if this is your fault, Effie, may you not repent it as you deserve to do!" added Mr. Dering sternly.

. . . . . .

Mabel Parkinson had always been her brother's confidante. She was a year older than Harold in age, and many years older in disposition; and as a boy he had trusted her, as a man he laid bare most of his secrets to her.

He had never spoken to her of his love for Effie Dering—for love it was—but Mabel had quickly divined it, and, after the first spasm of jealousy, pitied her brother, but could quite understand his adoration. Though Harold told his sister all his own secrets, he did not impart to her those of other people, and his midnight adventure with the lady of his love he fully intended to keep to himself. But, when he heard that Effie's engagement was broken off and that Hector had left the country, he could not help connecting these facts with the moonlight walk, and felt that he ought in honor to explain to Lyndhurst his part in the affair. Yet he had such a slight acquaintance with him that he feared to be officious, and, worse still, fatuous, if he appeared to think that his own presence on the scene had anything to do with the quarrel between the lovers.

He did not dare to go to Effie and ask her what he should do. He knew how proud she was, and guessed the torture she must be feeling, and did not wish to add to it. Yet he would have given worlds to find out whether she would wish him to be her champion. At last one day he determined to tell his sister, taking care first to bind her to silence. He gave her a dry statement of facts, relating the whole scene, even all their conversation—every word of which he remembered only too well—the meeting with Hector, the angry looks of the latter, and the change that had suddenly come over Effie as they parted with him. Then he waited for his sister's dictum.

"Shall I run up to town and speak to him?" he asked "Or had I better first ask Miss Dering what she wishes?"

"Oh, you must not do that!" said Mabel quickly. "It would hurt her terribly, and she would be obliged to beg you not to interfere. For myself, I always think people gain nothing by meddling with what does not concern them; but, if you think you can do any good by speaking to Mr. Lyndhurst, do so without first consulting Miss Dering."

"But supposing she is the one who has broken off the engagement? We know nothing but the fact that it is off; and, for my part, I imagine it was her doing."

"Then speaking to Mr. Lyndhurst would be only a waste of words. From what you tell me, however, I should imagine that he cried off; and I can't blame him."

"Mabel!"

"Now don't fly off into heroics, Harold! Put yourself in his place. Would you like to come upon the girl you were going to marry walking along the roads at midnight with a good-looking young man who had shown his evident admiration for her—for one can easily see that you do admire her?"

"Of course I do! Who would not?" cried Harold loyally. "And so will a thousand other men!"

"Well, you must allow that it was enough to provoke a man. Even if she had been alone, it would have been extraordinary enough; but to find her walking with you!"

"No doubt she told him the truth—that she had only just then met me."

"No doubt; but do jealous people always believe the truth?"

"If I thought he had left her, I would thrash him!"

"My dear boy, don't be ridiculous! I think, if it came to thrashing, you would get the worst of it. Besides, how would that mend matters?"

"You seem to take Lyndhurst's part Mabel."

"I can take no one's part, Harold, because it is all so very mysterious. According to your account, you find Miss Dering roaming about the woods and fields when she ought to have been in bed; you naturally enough, dismount and walk with her; then up comes Mr. Lyndhurst, which is a most extraordinary coincidence, and he, naturally enough also, is disgusted at the *rencontre*. I don't blame you, nor him; but I do think that Miss Dering was to blame."

"I am sure that, if she chose to explain, she could give a satisfactory reason for being out so late. She had most probably been sitting up with a sick person and did not care to boast of her good deeds.

"In that case she would certainly tell her lover, even at the risk of being thought self-praising."

"But then, don't you see, I don't think that was the real reason of the quarrel. Without being fatuous, I can't help thinking that my being there that night had, as you suggest, something to do with it."

"I am sure of it, or you would not have my permission to meddle."

"Then I will decide to go and see what I can do with that fellow."

"That fellow," did not prove amenable to reason at first. He was very much inclined to treat Harold as Mabel had suggested he might be treated; but Harold's straightforward manner gained him a hearing, and the two men parted with cordiality on both sides.

After Harold had left him, Hector pondered long and deeply; and the following note, which to her great astonishment Effie received from him a day or two later, was the result of his reflections.

"My dear Effie—Perhaps we were both hasty the other day. I do not think you can doubt my love for you; I need say no more about that. I am writing now to ask you if you have repented your decision of not giving me any explanation of the subject of our misunderstanding. If you have relented, and will tell me why you were out alone at such a time of night, you have only to send me the one word 'Come,' and I will be with you as soon as steam can bring me. I will allow you three days for consideration and for your answer, and, should the latter be unfavorable, I shall leave England on the ninth.

"Yours,

HECTOR ALDRITH LYNDHURST.

It was not a very loverlike letter, but Effie read it again and again in the solitude of her chamber, and wept over it as she thought she could never weep again. Proud to a fault herself, she could understand the feeling that prompted Hector to write thus. He evidently did not expect a favourable answer. And he could not get one either, Effie thought sadly. She could not explain what he wished; her lips were sealed as much as ever—nothing was altered.

"Oh, he ought to have trusted me!" she thought bitterly. "How can he let me go so easily?"

The longing to send for him and sob out her confession almost maddened her; but it had to be resisted. She wrote him a pitiful little note, cold as to the wording; but, if his pride had allowed him to read between the lines, he might have seen how dearly she loved him. However, the substance of it was that she could not alter her determination, and that, if Hector did not love her well enough to trust her implicitly, he must go.

And he went; and, two days after the *Clytie* had left Southampton with Hector on board, Effie heard that her sacrifice had been in vain—the real murderer of the keeper had been found.

CHAPTER VII.

Two years had passed. Effie was Effie Dering still, though through no lack of opportunities to take another surname. Harold Parkinson, after having done all he could do to set matters straight between her and Hector Lyndhurst, had thought that the demands of honor were by that time fully satisfied, and that he might now try his own chance. But Effie told him that it was perfectly useless to think of her in that light.

"I shall never marry," she said.

"And I shall never give up thinking of you until you do marry," said Harold.

"Don't be so silly," rejoined Effie. "I should be doing you a cruel wrong in marrying you when I do not care for you. I feel quite an old maid already," she said, with a sad smile, "and have not the slightest intention of ever leaving the Manor. Let these be my final words on the subject."

And Harold dared say no more.

He was by no means the only suitor for Miss Dering's hand. Effie was a girl who would never lack such, and, though her unfortunate love-affair had left an indelible wound, she was not one to wear her heart upon her sleeve for the country daws to peck at. After the nine days' wonder had subsided, there was nothing to remind any one that the girl had suffered any disappointment. Her laugh, if less frequent, was as merry as ever. Effie Dering felt that never again would she be the careless girl of a few months back—that she would spend her life in longing for a voice that she could not hear, a form that she could not see. But that knowledge did not make her step less light or her cheeks less rosy. She was as attractive as ever and as much sought after. But one and all of the aspirants received the same answer—Effie would never marry.

She was returning one afternoon from a visit to Patience Davis, who had been the innocent means of ruining Effie's life. Patience and her husband now rented a small farm on the uplands, belonging to Mr. Dering. When the real murderer of the gamekeeper had been found, betrayed by another of the poaching gang, Joe Davis was able to emerge from his hiding-place.

Effie had thereupon told the whole story to her father, who, though horrified at his daughter's part in the transaction, after reading her many homilies, promised her to do his best for the young couple she had befriended at such cost to herself as Mr. Dering little dreamed of. So, when Patience could get up and about, she found a nice little farm awaiting her, which she and Joe were now doing their best to cultivate. They were soon installed therein, and the sight of their happiness was some little solace to Effie for the wreck of her own hopes.

It had cost her many a struggle at first to visit them—that path through the wood always brought back such sad memories; but their gratitude to her was so unmistakable that she could not resist Patience's frequent entreaties to come and see them in their little domain.

She had been taking a present to her little god-child, Effie Davis—a gipsy-faced darling who could just toddle about enough to keep her mother in a state of constant anxiety about her—and was flushed and excited after a game of romps with her little namesake, so that she looked wonderfully unchanged to a watcher on the road, who catching sight of the white-robed girl coming down the wood, waited to speak to her in exactly the same spot where he had encountered her two years before.

For it was Hector Lyndhurst, who had returned to the county on the previous night, and who was now on his way to the Manor.

He had the advantage over Effie, for she had not the least idea that he was ever coming back, and he wondered how she would greet him. She wore a large hat that completely shaded her face, so he could not see how pale that face became as she emerged from the field next to the road and found him waiting there. Pride came to her aid however, and she held out her hand as if they were friends meeting after a few months' absence.

"I did not even know that you were coming back," she said, after they had shaken hands, Hector looking by far the more embarrassed of the two.

"I thought it was time," he replied, laughing, "or my tenants would have completely forgotten me. Besides, I am tired of roaming, and mean to settle down, for a year or so at least, on the land of my forefathers. This place seems little changed since I left," he continued, turning and walking by her side up the road. "Don't any of these old people ever die?"

"I don't think the idea enters their heads," replied Effie. "By-the-bye, one old woman died lately—Patience Davis's grandmother. Patience is married to that Joe Davis who was suspected of killing a gamekeeper in a poaching affray two years ago."

"And your people, are they flourishing?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Effie; "father is as keen on hunting as ever, and mother does not look a day older than when you saw her last!"

They passed through the lodge gate and walked up the avenue in silence, past the bench that had been the scene of their parting two years before. Effie wondered if her companion remembered it; dreaded that he should see the tears that would start to her eyes from very joy at having him back again, though she felt that he would now never be more than a friend.

Mrs. Dering drove up the avenue behind them, and caught up with them before they reached the house. She reined up her ponies and expressed intense astonishment at seeing Hector. She made him and her daughter get into the carriage, and they were all chatting away in as unembarrassed a fashion as they drove along as if there had never been any idea of a marriage between the two young people.

Effie could hardly realize that Hector was sitting opposite to her; it seemed like a dream. While he parried Mrs. Dering's numerous questions, Effie had a good opportunity of stealing glances at him. No more trace of a broken heart did he show than did she herself. He was perhaps a little more sunburned, but looked as boyish as ever. She found herself smothering the sigh that was much too sentimental for the occasion, and, determined to show that she too had become perfectly heart-whole, she joined in the conversation, and talked more nonsense then and at tea afterwards than had passed her lips for the past two years.

Mr. and Mrs. Dering were perfectly friendly with Hector, but not quite so effusive to him as formerly, and wisely resolved to let events run their course.

Mrs. Dering was not one of those who thought matrimony essential to a woman's happiness; and, as, at her father's death, Effie would be very well off, there was no necessity for her trying such a venture.

* * * *

"How many times do you intend to ask me this silly question?" asked Effie Dering, pouting slightly as she averted her face from that of Harold Parkinson, who was bending down to try to catch her expression in the fading light. "I wish you would be more sensible," she continued, after a short pause; "you know my answer is always the same. Why can't you be satisfied with friendship? It is more lasting than love;" and she stifled a sigh.

"Why can't we eat stones instead of bread?" asked Harold bitterly.

"Because we can't bite stones," said Effie, with a laugh that sounded terribly heartless to the man at her side. "Do be a little reasonable, Mr. Parkinson," she added. "I have told you over and over again that I can like you only as a friend; it would be impossible for my sentiments towards you to change. In fact, the only way I could alter towards you would be to like you less, instead of more, for being so persistent."

"You cannot blame a man for trying all he knows to gain a girl for his wife whom he loves so dearly as I love you," was the reply.

They were riding together towards the Manor in the autumn gloaming. The meeting had been an accidental one. Effie was returning from a visit to a friend; Harold had taken a round in the direction of her house on the chance of meeting the object of his affections. Many a time and oft had these two met in the same way, and any one observing the frequent encounters would have immagined that they had been arranged.

Effie did not object in the least to Harold as a friend if he would only "talk sense," as she expressed it. Since Hector had left her, she could not endure to hear words of love from another man. She turned round to Harold now with a determined look on her pretty features.

"Once for all, Mr. Parkinson," she said, "let me tell you that it is utterly useless to think of me in that way. I have told you again and again that I never intend to marry. Don't think me unkind when I say that it would be more dignified on your part to accept my answer once for all as final, try to make up your mind to accept my friendship. Don't try to look sentimental—I should not see you by this light—and come in and have some tea."

For they had reached the lodge gates.

Her manner softened the harshness and flippancy of her words, and Harold was man enough to see their sense. He turned in and through the gate with her, and they trotted briskly up the avenue.

They found quite a party assembled in the drawing-room—the Rector and his wife—a pretty young woman whom he had lately married, and to whom Mrs. Dering had taken a great fancy—and Hector Lyndhurst, who had been shooting with Mr. Dering.

Hector did not look too well-pleased to see Effie's companion; but he greeted them both pleasantly as they came in, blinking at the light.

Every one looked cheery except Hector, and the momentary gloom on his face soon vanished.

"We were talking about our little dance, Effie," said Mrs. Dering. "I am trying to persuade Mrs. Beauchamp to come to it, and Mr. Beauchamp is resisting me.

"Oh you must come, Mrs. Beauchamp!" said Effie, turning brightly to the young wife of the Rector, who was looking to her husband for guidance. "Of course you must come! I will persuade Mr. Beauchamp; I have known him all my life, and he does just what I tell him."

"Most people have to do that it appears," said Harold, who was sitting next to her, in an undertone.

"Now, Mr. Beauchamp, say 'yes' said Effie, acknowledging the last remark only by a shrug of the shoulders, and turning her back upon the luckless young fellow who had uttered it, "and dance the first valse with me."

"You would be very sorry if I were to take you at your word, Effie," laughed the Rector; "but I think I must let poor little Susan come, even if I stay away, and let her have a chance of showing off one of her smart dresses;" and he smiled lovingly at his little bride.

"And Mrs. Beauchamp could dine and sleep here," said Effie—"if the inducement of a dance with me is not sufficient to bring you, that is to say."

And consent to this arrangement was given then and there.

"May I have that dance that Mr. Beauchamp has refused?" asked Harold boldly of Effie.

"Don't be too sure that you will be invited," laughed the latter. "Mother, do you intend to ask Mr. Parkinson?"

"I have already been asked," said Harold triumphantly; "the note came this morning. I may give my answer in person, Mrs. Dering."

"Oh, mother, you really ought to consult me as to the choice of men!" said Effie, while the Rector's wife looked a little shocked at this style of conversation, not knowing quite what to make of it. "I am not quite sure that I want Mr. Parkinson to come."

"Well, you will have to put up with me now that your mother has asked me," he replied laughingly.

"I must have a dance too, Effie," said Hector, "before Parkinson engages you for them all. May I have number two?"

Effie agreed to this with a charming blush. She could not quite treat Hector as she did Harold, though she did her best to forget that their relations to each other had been so very different. And Hector, noting the difference in her manner, is fool enough to think that Parkinson was in greater favour than was he himself.

The dance in question was a little impromptu one for the next evening. Two nieces of Mrs. Dering's were coming to the Manor for a week, and Mrs. Dering wished to make it pleasant for them. All the near neighbors had been asked, and one or two particular friends at a distance.

Effie looked a vision of beauty, in the eyes of two men at least. She wore white, which always suited her, unrelieved by any ornament. Her fresh young beauty could stand the perfection of simplicity in dress, and she remembered that Hector had admired her thus.

She read in his eyes, as he came up for the promised dance, that that admiration had not abated one whit.

"Surely he could not look at me like that unless he cared for me," said the girl to herself, as he put his arm around her waist and whirled her off. "But if he still cares why does he not speak?"

Hector talked on the most commonplace subjects, and this was Effie's greatest trial. She remembered the time when every look was a caress, and she could sometimes feel the tears coming into her eyes at the altered tones of the voice she loved best to hear.

Effie little knew what was passing in Hector's mind as he held her to him and they floated round, the best-looking and best dancing couple in the room. When he had first put his arm around her waist, a mist came before his eyes, and for a moment he feared that he should have to sit down. But the momentary weakness passed away; and no one to see the two young people dancing on with calm faces in correct time to the music, then stopping to rest and exchanging a few sentences in the usual conventional manner, would have imagined the temptest raging in the heart of one, the wild regret in that of the other.

Effie made a delightful little hostess. All the plain girls got partners, and every one said the dance was a great success. But when it was all over and the lights were out the little heroine of the evening was lying with her face pressed down on her pillow, sobbing as if her heart would break.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HUNTING TIGERS.

The Methods Used by Sportsmen in India.

The only two methods of tiger-hunting that are practical really here are "netting," and sitting up all night in a tree by a "kill" waiting for the tiger to return for his food. Almost all sportsmen have tried this latter, and generally been disappointed, as I was in another part of India, and have always solemnly vowed that each occasion should be their very last, only to be found at it again on the very next opportunity. Some really like this solitary watching, but it has very many drawbacks to its enjoyment. Several Indian sportsmen, who have killed their forty or fifty tigers, have told me they had been nearly always unsuccessful with it. It is very wearisome work sitting from about 4 o'clock in the afternoon until day break next day, always on the alert to see something that does not come; and with the darkness mosquitoes come in quantities, and perhaps a scorpion will ferret you out, or, worse than all, you may be visited by the red ant. It is very uncertain when a tiger will return to the "kill." He may do so as early as 3 or 4 or not at all, often being frightened away, perhaps by some unforseen circumstance." The slightest rustle will make him stop, and once his suspicions are aroused he will not venture near. To shoot him on foot by stalking is an impossibility. The sportsmen will occasionally come upon a tiger when after other game, and may then have a chance of a shot. If there are a few men who keep together, a tiger even if wounded, will think twice before charging into the middle of them, and will always shirk the last ten or fifteen feet. None but the most fool-hardy or utterly ignorant would venture to follow a wounded tiger into a long grass or very close cover, where it has every advantage, and the hunter may be seized before he has time to raise his rifle. One of the tiger's greatest aids in his attacks is his voice, the sudden coughing roar of which is paralyzing to the coolest, and of course for a certain shot the nerves must be perfectly steady with "no flinching."—[Harper's Magazine.

It was in 1827, and at a theatrical fund dinner in Edinburgh, that Sir Walter Scott declared himself to be the author of the "Waverley Novels." This is the speech he made on that occasion: "I did not expect, on coming here to-day, that I should have to disclose a secret. Now that it is out, however, I beg leave to observe that I am sole and undivided author of these novels. I confess I am guilty, and am afraid to examine the extent of my delinquency. 'Look on't again I dare not.' The wand Prospero is now broken, and my book is buried."