

LOVE REASONS NOT.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW IT HAPPENED.

"Mother," said Lord Chandos, "I never knew a month pass as this has done—the days have wings. It is the sixteenth to-day, and it does not seem to be twenty-four hours since it was the first."

"That shows, at least, that life has been pleasant to you," said the countess.

"Yes, it has been very pleasant," he replied, and then sighed deeply.

"Why do you sigh, Lance? The future can be as pleasant as the past, can it not?"

He looked up half impatiently.

"I sigh to think that my share in it is all ended. I must be in England by the end of June."

"Make the most of the time left," said my lady; "there's another week, at least. Let us go everywhere and see everything. In all probability we shall not meet at Nice again."

He had expected contradiction, he had expected his mother to oppose his desire of returning home, and he was slightly piqued to find that so far from opposing him, she seemed to fall into the idea as though it was the most natural one.

"I think," he pursued, "that if I leave here on the twenty-seventh that will be soon enough."

"Yes," said the countess, quietly. "It is not such a long journey after all."

So she would not oppose him, she would not argue with him, but left him to take his own way. The handsome face grew shadowed, the frank eyes troubled. It is very hard when a man cannot force any one to contradict him. He rose from his chair, he walked uneasily up and down the room; he spoke almost nervously on one or two points and then he said:

"Mother, I suppose you know what I intend doing."

She looked up at him with the blandest smile and sweetest air.

"Doing, Lance—about the boat to-night, do you mean?"

She purposely affected to misunderstand him.

"The boat?" he repeated. "No, I mean about—my—future—my marriage."

"I cannot say that I know what you intend doing, Lance, but I am quite sure you will never again have the bad taste to offend your father and me. I can trust you so far."

He looked more uncomfortable; he could always manage the countess better when she was angry than when she was amiable. He stopped abruptly before her and looking at her said:

"I must marry Leone, mother, I must."

"Very well, Lance. When you are twenty-one, you can do as you like."

"Oh, mother," cried the young lord, "be more humane, do not be so frigid and cold; speak to me about it. I am your only son, surely my marriage is a matter of some importance to you."

There was a passion of entreaty in his voice, and Lady Lanswell looked kindly at him.

"Certainly your marriage is of more importance than anything else on earth; but you cannot expect me to look with favor on that tempestuous young person who ranted at me like a third-rate actress from a travelling theatre; you must excuse me, Lance, but there are limits to human endurance, and she is beyond mine."

"Mother, let me be happy, let me go and marry her, let me bring her back here, and we shall all be happy together."

"My dear Lance, I should not consider a person of her position a fit companion for my maid; for myself, I quite declare I shall not oppose your marriage with the girl—it is quite useless, since you are of age, to do as you like; but I shall never see you or speak to you again; when you leave me here for that purpose our good-bye will last beyond death. Still you understand I do not seek to win you from your purpose you are free to do as you will."

The misery on his handsome young face touched her a little, and she had to remind herself that she was doing all she did for his own good.

"We will not talk any more about it, Lance," she said, kindly; "words will not alter facts. Did your father tell you what we proposed about the boat to-night?"

His lips trembled as he tried to answer her.

"I cannot throw off sorrow as you can, mother; I am talking to you about that which will make the misery of the happiness of my life, and you think of nothing but a boat."

"Words are so useless, Lance," repeated my lady; "they are but empty sounds. I am going out to look for some cameos; I think I should like a set, they are very elegant and recherche."

So saying, my lady left the room as though no serious thought occupied her mind.

Then, for the first time, something like impatience with his fate came over the young lord, something like impatience with Leone, for whose love he had so much to suffer. He loved his proud, beautiful mother who had, unknown to him, such great influence over him. He could not endure the thought of life-long separation from her. The glamour of a boy's first mad love had fallen from him, and he saw things as they were; he could estimate better than he had done before, what it meant to give up father, mother and friends all for one love.

He did not recover his spirits all day, but the temptation never once came near him to break his word or forget Leone. That night, one of the loveliest that ever dawned on earth, they were all going to a fete given by the Countess Spiza, and one part of the entertainment was that the beautiful grounds were to be illuminated.

Lord Chandos had never seen his mother look so proud, so brilliant or so handsome as on that night. She wore a superb dress of green velvet, with a suit of diamonds worth a king's ransom. Lady Marion wore a dress of rich lace, with cream-color roses and green leaves. The fete was well at-

tended; a great number of French people and English were there. The earl had declined. Moonlit gardens and illuminated grounds had not much attraction for him. Lord Chandos sat for some little time by his mother's side; he was enjoying an ice, and as he watched her he felt a sensation of pride in her beauty—a keen sense of regret that they should ever be parted.

An involuntary cry of admiration came from the countess, and Lord Chandos looking in the direction where her eyes were fixed, saw Lady Erskine. Never had the great queen of blondes looked so lovely; the fine, fairy-like web of costly lace fell in graceful folds around a figure that stood alone for grace and symmetry. She wore nothing but green leaves in her golden hair; her arms, bare to the shoulders, were white, firm, and statuesque. Over her face, when she saw Lord Chandos, came a beautiful, brilliant flush.

The countess and her son were sitting in one of the pretty salons, where some of the most famous works of art were collected. There was an exquisite bust of Clytie which attracted much attention; they had been commenting on it, and Lady Lanswell was saying how much she would like a copy of it.

"Here comes something more beautiful than Clytie," she said, as Lady Marion advanced to meet them.

She made room for the young heiress by her side. Lady Marion had schooled herself well, but her task was no easy one—she was so candid, so loyal, so true in all her dealings, that the least attempt at anything savoring of deception was unpleasant to her; still she would, of course, do anything to help Lady Lanswell. So she sat down by her side and talked with her usual gentle grace.

She said, after a time:

"Lady Lanswell, I have a great favor to ask of you. If you do not wish to go back to England just yet, will you join me? I am trying to persuade Lady Cambrey to make a tour through Spain."

She drew a long breath of relief when the words were spoken, she was so thankful to have them said and done with. She mentally resolved that never would she promise to do anything of this kind again.

Lady Lanswell's calm restored hers.

"To Spain?" repeated the countess.

"What a traveler you are, Lady Marion. What has put Spain into your mind?"

"I have always longed to see the Alhambra," said Lady Marion, with perfect truth. "As we are so near, it would be a pity to go back without seeing it."

"I quite agree with you. It may be some years before you come on the Continent again—you are quite right to go to Spain. And you really wish us to join your party?"

"Certainly, I should be delighted; it would increase my pleasure a hundredfold," replied the young heiress, promptly.

"You are very kind to say so. I will go if you can persuade Lord Chandos to go with us."

"How can I do that?" she asked, with a smile. "Teach me how to 'persuade' Lady Lanswell. I have never been able to 'persuade' any one."

The Countess rose from her seat with a light laugh.

"I am afraid that in this case, persuasion, argument, and reason would be in vain. Lance, take Lady Marion to see the lamps in the almond trees—they are really very fine."

He took the soft, silken wrapper from her and wrapped it round her shoulders.

"Let us go and see the lamps," he said, and they went.

Ah, well. The sky above was filled with pale pure stars; the almond-trees filled the air with delicate perfume, the nightingales were singing in the distant trees; great floods of silver moonlight fell over the grounds, in which the lilies gleamed palely white, and the roses hung their heavy heads.

They went together to the grove where the lamps shone bright as huge pearls. The path was a narrow one and he drew the white hand through his arm. How did it come about? Ah, who shall tell? Perhaps the wind whispered it, perhaps the nightingales sung about it, perhaps something in the great white lily leaves suggested it, perhaps the pale, pure stars looked disapproving; but it happened that the white hand felt the arm, and was clasped in a warm, strong hand—a clasp such as only love gives.

Who shall say how it happened? She raised her fair face to his in the soft, pure moonlight, and said to him:

"Must you really go back to England, Lord Chandos?"

The voice was sweet as music—the face, so fair, so pure, so proud.

"Must you?" she added, "really go?"

"Yes, I am compelled to return," he answered slowly.

"Need it be yet?" she said. "I know you must go, but the journey through Spain will be so pleasant, and we might make a compromise. I will shorten the journey if you will delay your return."

And before he left the almond grove Lord Chandos had promised to do so, and as he made the promise he bent down and kissed the white hand lying in his.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WAITING FOR HIM.

Never had June seen such roses, never had lilies opened such white chalices, never had the trees looked so green, or the grass so long and thick, never had the birds sung as they sung this June, never had the light of the sun been so golden bright. The smile of the beautiful summer lay over the land, but in no place was it so fair as in River View. It was a scene like fairy-land.

So Leone thought it as she watched day by day the beauty of blossom and leaf. It was in the month of May she first began to watch the signs of coming summer; with the first breath of the hawthorn, her heart grew light and a new beauty of hope came in her face. It was May and she was coming in June. She worked harder than ever. She rose early and retired late; these months of hard study and hard reading had changed her more than she knew herself. One year ago she had risen a beautiful, strong, healthy girl, full of fire, and life, and power. Now she was a refined, intellectual woman, full of genius and talent, full of poetry and eloquence, full of originality and wit; then she was a girl to be admired, now she was a woman who

could rule a kingdom, whose power was unlimited.

She had acquired more in these few months of study than some people learn in years. She knew how great his delight would be, and she smiled to think how entirely at her ease she should be, even with his stately lady mother; she should feel no great awe of her in the future, for if Heaven had not given her the position of a lady by birth, she had made herself one by study and refinement.

So he was coming, and their real married life was to begin. She thought with a shudder of the pain she had passed through, of the horror of that terrible discovery. It was all over now, thank Heaven. It had never been any brand or stigma to her; she had never felt any false shame over it; she had never bowed her bright head as though a blight had passed over her. She said to herself it was not her fault she was not at least to blame. She had believed herself in all honor to be the wife of Lord Chandos, and she could not feel that the least shadow of blame rested on her.

He was coming home. Through the long hours of the summer day, she thought off nothing else. True, since the month of June, his letters had been very few and much cooler. True, it has been a severe shock to her, to hear that he had gone to Nice; but, as his letter said nothing of Lady Marion, and she knew nothing even of the existence of such a person, that did not matter. Why had he gone to Nice when June was so near? She wrote to him to ask the question, but his answer was: Because his parents had gone there. Then she said no more; that seemed quite natural. The only thing that occurred to her was, he would have a longer journey in June; he would come to her as he had promised, but he would take a longer time in traveling.

Loose faith in him! She flung back her head, with a bright, proud laugh. No, nothing could shake her faith in him; his proud lady mother had managed to get him under her influence—what did that matter? He loved her and her alone. She remembered the words spoken on her wedding day; when she had asked him if he was quite sure their marriage was legal, his answer was, "and that nothing could part them except death."

How well she remembered those words, "except death"! He had taken her in his arms and kissed her, as though even death itself should not claim her. No shadow of fear entered her mind. She knew that he would come, as surely as she knew that the sun would rise and the day would dawn.

The thirtieth of June. No gift of second sight came to her, to tell her that on the twenty-seventh of June Lord Chandos had sat down and wrote her a very long letter, telling her it was impossible for him to be at home on the thirtieth of June, as he had promised to go with his parents to Spain. A large party were going, and he must join them; but his heart would be with her on that day. He should think of her, from morning dawn until sunset, and he would be with her soon. He was vexed that he had to take the journey; it was quite against his will, yet he had been over-persuaded. He should see her soon now; and, whatever he did, she must not feel in the least degree distressed, or put about. Their happiness was only delayed for a short time.

A long letter. She had no gift of second sight; she could not see that his face burned with a shameful flush as he wrote it; that for himself he had no pity; that his heart went out to her with a warmer love than ever, but that the fear of his mother's taunts and the pain on Lady Marion's face kept him where he was.

Then, when the long letter was written, he directed it and sent it by his valet to post; nor could she see how that same valet intended going to post it at once, but was prevented, and then laid it aside for an hour, as he thought, and forgot it for two whole days; then, fearing his master's anger, said nothing about it, trusting that the delay might be attributed to something wrong in the post; and so, on the very day it should have been given to her, it was put into the post-office, three days too late. She could not know all this, and she longed for the thirtieth of June as the dying long for cold water, as the thirsty hart for the clear spring.

It came. She had longed for it, waited for it, prayed for it, and now it was here. She awoke early in the morning; it was to her as though a bridegroom were coming; the song of the birds woke her, and they seemed to know that he was coming—they were up and awake in the earliest dawn. Then a great flood of golden sunlight came to welcome her; she hastened to the window to see what the day was like, and whether the sky was blue. It seemed to her that every little bird sung, "He is coming."

Here were the roses laughing in at the window, nodding as though they would say, "This is the thirtieth of June." There flashed the deep, clear river, hurrying on to the great sea over which as must have crossed; the wind whispered among the leaves, and every leaf had a voice. "He is coming to-day," they all said—"coming to-day."

There was a great stir even at that early hour in the morning between the white and purple butterflies; there was a swift, soft cooing from the wood-pigeons; the world seemed to laugh in the warm embrace of the rising sun. She laughed too—a sweet, happy laugh that stirred the rose leaf and jasmine.

"Oh, happy day!" she cried—"oh, kindly sun and kindly time, that brings my love back to me!"

She looked at the gate through which he would pass—at the rose tree from which he would gather the rose; and she stretched out her hands with a great, longing cry.

"Send him quickly—oh, kind Heaven!" she cried. "I have waited so long, my eyes ache to look at him. I thirst for his presence as flowers thirst for dew."

She looked at her watch, it was but just six—the laborers were going to the field, the maids to the dairy, the herdsmen to their flocks. She could see the hay makers in the meadow, and the barges dropped lazily down the stream. The time would soon pass and he would be here before noon. Could it be possible that he should see him so soon?

"In six hours," she repeated, "she should see him in six hours."

Ah, well she had plenty to do. She went round the pretty villa to see if everything was as heliked best to see it, then she occupied herself in ordering for his enjoyment every dish that she knew he liked; and then she dressed herself to sit and wait for

him at the window. She looked as though she had bathed in dew and warmed by the golden sun, so bright, so sparkling, so fresh and brilliant, her eyes radiant with hope and love, the long silken lashes like fringe, the white lids half drooping, her face, with its passionate beauty heightened by the love that filled her heart and soul. She wore a dress of amber muslin with white lace, and in the rich masses of her dark hair lay a creamy rose. Fair and bright as the morning itself she took her place at the window to watch the coming of him who was so many miles away. It is thus that women believe men, it is thus that men keep the most solemn vows that they can make.

The maid who brought her tea wondered why her young mistress chose to sit at the window to drink it; indeed, she started with wonder at the brilliant beauty of the face turned to her.

It struck her now that she might in very truth begin to expect him; the sun was growing warmer, the flowers were wide awake, the brown bees were busy among the carnations, the birds had done half their day's work; some of the tall-plumed lilies were beginning to droop, and the white acacia blossoms had fallen on the long grass. Her whole soul in her eyes, and those eyes fixed longingly on the white gate she sat there until noon.

Great city bells rang out the hour; in the villages it was told by sweetold chimes. The hay-makers sat down to rest, the butterflies rested in the great hearts of the red roses, the bees settled in the carnations, the languid odoriferous wind was still while the strokes rang out one after another—fragrant, sunny, golden noon.

He had not come; but every moment was bringing him nearer. Some one brought her a glass of wine, some fruit and biscuit. She would not touch them because she would not take her eyes from the white gate through which he had to pass.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE THIRTIETH OF JUNE.

She did not grow impatient; the love which sustained her, the hope that inspired her was too sweet; her soul seemed to be in a blissful, happy trance; no doubt, no fear, no presentiment of coming disappointment dimmed the radiance of those sunny brows. He was coming fast as steam could bring him; it did not matter if he would not come yet, if more of the sunny hours passed—even if he delayed until even-tide, he would come so sure as the sun shone in the blue-sky.

Noon passed. One—two—three—still she had never moved or stirred. Four and five struck, still the light had not died from her eyes nor the smile from her face; he would come; the stars might fall from heaven, the great earth upheave, the rivers rise, the hills fall, night become day, darkness light, but he would come. Who so faithful, so fond, so true? And at five her maid came again; this time she had a cup of strong, fragrant coffee, and Leone drank it eagerly. She would wait for dinner; she expected someone, and she would wait. Quickly enough she replaced the cup and returned to watch; he might have come while she had the cup to her lips; but, ah, no, no one had trodden on the white acacia blossoms—they were uncrushed.

Perhaps the long watching had wearied her, or the warm glow of June afternoon fatigued her, or the strong odor of the flowers reached her brain. She looked at her watch; it was after five. He would come, most certainly; she knew that; but she was tired, and a great tearless sob rose to her lips. The heat of the June sun was growing less; she leaned her head against the casement of the window, and the white eyelids fell over the dark, passionate, tender eyes. She was dreaming, then; she heard the ripple of running water that sung as it ran, and the words were:

"A ring in pledge I gave her,
And vows of love we spoke—
Those vows were all forgotten,
The ring asunder broke."

Over and over again the sweet, sad words were repeated. She was standing on the brink of the mill-stream again, her lover's kisses warm on her lips, her lover's hands clasping hers. Ah, Heaven, that the dream could have lasted or she never woke! A bird woke her by perching on her hand; perhaps he thought it was a lily, and she started in affright. The bells were ringing six; she had lost one whole hour, yet Heaven had sent that sleep in mercy; one hour of forgetfulness strengthened her for what she had to suffer. She woke with a start; for one moment her brain was confused betwix the dream and the reality. Was it the ripple of the mill-stream, or was it the sighing of the wind among the roses? She had slept for an hour. Had he come? Had she slept while he entered the garden? Was he hiding in jest?

She rang the bell quickly as the trembling hands would allow; and when the pretty, coquettish maid answered it she asked had any one come, had any one called; and the answer was, "No." Still she could not rest; she looked through the rooms, through the garden; ah, no, there were no traces of any arrival—none.

Once more to her watch at the window; but the scene began to change. There was no longer the golden glow over land and water, no longer the golden glare of a summer's day, no longer the sweet summer's noise, and the loud, jubilant songs of the birds. A gray tint was stealing over earth and sky; the lilies were closing their white cups; the birds singing their vesper hymn; longer shadows fell on the grass; cooler winds stirred the roses. He will come. The sky might pale, the earth darken, the sun set, the flowers sleep; but he would come. She would let no doubt of him enter her faithful heart. Let the night shadow fall, the sun of her love and her hope should still keep light.

And then from sky and earth, from clear river and green wood the light of the day faded—eight, nine, and ten struck—the world grew dark and still—she kept her watch unbroken. It might be night when he returned; but she would hear the click of the gate and be there to welcome.

Ah, me, the sorrow that gathered like a storm cloud over the beautiful face—the light, brightness and hope died from it as the light died from the heavens. Still she would not yield. Even after the shadows of evening had fallen over the land she kept her place. He would come. The servants of the household grew alarmed at last; and one by one they ventured in to try to persuade their young mistress to eat, to sleep, or to rest.

To one and all she said the same thing:

"Hush, do not speak; I am listening!" It had grown too late to see; there was no moon, and the pale light of the stars revealed nothing; it had grown colder, too. There was a faint sound in the wind that told of coming rain. Her own maid—more at liberty to speak than the others—prayed her to come in; but all advice, reason, remonstrance received the same answer: "I must not leave this spot until the twenty-four hours are ended."

She would not have suffered half the torture the letter arrived; she would have known then at once that she was not to expect him; and the ordeal of waiting would have been over at once; but she clung to the hope he would come, he must come. She recalled his promises given solemnly—she said to herself with a little shudder:

"If he does not come to-day he will never come."

And then she hated herself for the half-implied doubt of him. No matter if the sun had fallen and the nightingale was singing; no matter if the solemn hush of night had fallen, and soft, deep shadows lay around, he would come. The sighs of the wind grew deeper; the roses drooped. She leaned forward, for it seemed to her there was a stir among the trees; it was only some night bird in quest of its prey. Again she bent her head; surely, at last, there was the click of the gate. But no; it was only the swaying of the branches in the wind.

Then clear and full and distinct, cleaving the air, rang out the hour of twelve; it was midnight, and he had not come. The thirtieth of June was over, and he had failed.

One by one she counted those strokes as they fell, in the vain hope that she must be mistaken, that it was only eleven. When she realized it she rose from her solitary watch with a long low sigh. He had failed; he had not come. She would not judge him; but he had not kept that promise which was more solemn to her than any oath. There were many perils, both by sea and land; the steamer might have run ashore, the train may have been delayed; but if the appointment had been for her to keep she would have kept it in spite of all obstacles and all cost.

She rose from her long dull watch; she tried to cross the room and ring the bell, but the strength of her limbs failed her. She did not fall, she sunk into a senseless, almost helpless heap on the floor; and there long after midnight, her servants found her, and for some time believed her dead. That was the thirtieth of June—for which she had hoped, worked, and prayed as woman never did before.

They raised her from the ground and took her to her room. One kinder than the others sat by her until the dawn, when the dark eyes opened with a look in them which was never to die away again.

"This is the first of July," she said, faintly.

And the maid, seeing that the morning had dawned, said:

"Yes, it is July."

She never attempted to rise that day, but lay with her face turned to the wall, turned from the sunlight and the birds' song, the bloom of flowers, the ripple of leaves, the warmth and light of the summer, thinking only of the mill-stream and the words that for her had so terrible a prophecy:

"A ring in pledge I gave her,
And vows of love we spoke—
Those vows were all forgotten,
The ring asunder broke."

Over and over again they rang through her brain and her heart, while she fought against them, while she lay trying to deaden her senses, to stifle her reason, doing deadly battle with the fears that assailed her. She would not give in; she would not doubt him; there would come to her in time some knowledge; she would know why he had failed.

Failed, oh, God! how hard the word was to say—failed. Why, if every star in the sky had fallen at her feet it would not have seemed so wonderful.

Perhaps his mother—that proud, haughty woman, who seemed to trample the world under her feet—perhaps she had prevented his coming; but he would come, no matter what the mill-stream said, no matter what his mother wished. The day passed and the morrow came—the second of July. She rose on that day and went down stairs the shadow of her former self—pale, cold, and silent. She did not say to herself "He will come to-day," hope was dying within her. Then at noon came the letter—her maid brought it in. She gave a low cry of delight when she saw the beloved handwriting, that was followed by a cry of pain. He would not have written if he had been coming; that he had written proved that he had no intention of coming. She took the letter, but she dared not trust herself to open it in the presence of her maid; but when the girl was gone, as there was no human eye to rest on the tortured face she could not control, she opened it.

Deadly cold seemed to seize her; a deadly shudder made the letter fall from her hands. No, he was not coming.

He must go to Spain—to Spain, with his parents and a party of tourists—but he loved her just the same, and he should return to her.

"He is weak of purpose," she said to herself when she had read the last word; "he loves me still; he will come back to me; he will make me his wife in the eyes of the law as he has done in the sight of Heaven. But he is weak of purpose. The Countess of Lanswell has put difficulties in his way; and he has let them conquer him."

Then came to her mind those strong words, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

For the second time her servants found her cold and senseless on the ground; but this time she had an open letter in her hand.

The pity was that the whole world could not see how women trust the promises of men, and how men keep theirs.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE QUEEN'S HEALTH.

She is Crippled by Rheumatism—Walking Has Become an Impossibility.

A despatch from London says:—The fact is regretfully admitted by those close to the Queen that her Majesty must remain almost a cripple the rest of her days. It was hoped for weeks that she would recover the use of her limbs, after her severe attack of rheumatism in August, but her disability became chronic, and it is believed she never again will be able to walk more than a few steps at a time. It is impossible for her to step up or down, even in and out of her carriage, and an inclined gangway is now provided for the latter purpose. A specially designed chair has been provided for carrying her Majesty up and down stairs.