LORD KILLEEN'S REVENGE

CHAPTER XIV.

The sound that had startled Varley and Mrs. Dundas out of their love-trance had come from a source little dreamed of by them. As they hurried toward the house, the veil of evergreens behind where they had stood was lightly thrust aside, and the moonbeams revealed the pale, startled face of Constantia MacGillicuddy.

She looked so white, so horrified, that Stronge, who was with her, thought she was going to faint. She had witnessed that last scene—the wild embrace, the swift and guilty separation. It had been a sudden awakening, a first glimpse into the hateful side of life, its lawlessness, its vile treachery.

It had all happened in a moment, and when Stronge had realized the meaning of the picture before him it was too late to prevent Constantia's realizing also. She looked straight at him now with a very anguish of distress in her eyes, and tried to say something, but could not. There was a touch of shame about her, that made him wretched. If he could only have looked back at her with a glance sufficiently unconscious as to convince her that he had seen nothing, and that she was alone in her knowledge of the odious discovery she had just made, he felt matters would be easier for her. But he could not do it. Her clear eyes read him through and through.

A sense of savage anger rose within him that she should have been subjected to such an ordeal; that her pure, strong, childish nature should have been thus roughly roused to a knowledge better left unlearned. It was a thoroughly unfortunate affair altogether, but there was at least a little grain of comfort to him in the thought that if she was to witness such a disgraceful thing he should have been her companion.

"Yes, I saw all," he said, involuntarily making answer to the unspoken question in her frightened eyes.

"Oh, it is horrible!" said Constantia, with a violent shudder. "Oh! how can it be true? And Lady Varley—"

"Come and sit down here," said Stronge, drawing her toward a garden chair. He could see that she was trembling. "And do not think so much of it. I am sorry from my soul that you should have been here, but—"

"What does it matter about me?" cried she, impatiently. "Do not think of me at all. Think of Lady Varley. Oh, poor thing! And her little baby so ill. His baby, too. And he—"

"Is the child ill?"

"It is always ailing, and now it is worse. It is dying, I think, but she will not believe it. But you will see how unhappy she must be, and now this. If it should come to her ears, if—Oh!" cried she, clasping her hands, "if I were a man I should like to kill him."

Her face was deadly pale in the moonlight; her lips quivering. Stronge felt the blood grow warm about his heart. He asked himself at this moment whether it were not his duty, as a true lover, to obey even her vaguest wish. Why not throw Lord Varley's falseness in his teeth, and—

"As for her," said Constantia in a low tone, between her teeth—she was looking straight before her, she had apparently forgotten Stronge—"I shall let her know," she said; "I shall certainly speak to her."

"To Lady Varley?" asked he, in dismay.

"Lady Varley! No! But to her, Mrs. Dundas! My—my cousin." She seemed to shrink from the word. "She shall know at least what I think of her. I shall compel her to listen. She shall give up all thoughts of Lord Varley. Oh, Mr. Stronge!"— cried she, turning to him with flushed cheeks, "you do not know perhaps, that she was once engaged to him. They were lovers; they quarreled; they both married; and yet now! Oh, it is terrible! And she is my cousin. I feel as if I, through her, were injuring Lady Varley. Was there ever anything so disgraceful, so wicked?" She paused, nervously, and then suddenly burst into tears. "Oh!" she sobbed miserably. "I wish—I wish I had not seen it."

"So do I from my heart, my poor child," said Stronge, earnestly. He drew her toward him impulsively, and she leaned her forehead against his arm, and cried there until her agitation grew milder. It did not seem strange to her that she should thus lean upon him; her mind was entirely absorbed with her grievous discovery. But Andrew Stronge comprehended the meaning of her indifference in his presence, and the gasp of despair tightened on his heart.

"You will be sensible," he said, presently; "you will not speak to Mrs. Dundas to-night; you will wait for a good opportunity, and then do what you can. Promise me this."

"Well, yes, it shall be as you wish." She sighed heavily, but her sobs ceased, and she dried her eyes, and drew herself up to her full height, and began to wish she hadn't been so absurd. She remembered that Stronge had had his arm round her, and that she had cried upon his shoulder; she blushed crimson, and a pang of fear shot through her. What would—she checked this thought, and blushed even deeper in doing so—what would anyone think of her, could they know of it?

She felt unreasonably angry with Stronge, but the anger died as she raised her eyes, most reluctantly, to his. Who could be angry with that grave, kindly, anxious face? She turned away, and let her gaze descend upon the gravel at her feet, and slowly, thoughtfully, drew her fan through her fingers.

"I am tired," she said, wearily. "Let us go back to the house."

They entered it by the armory door; the hall inside was brilliantly lit by lamps with blood-red shades, and a subdued crimson glow was the consequence. It lit up the faces round with a warm radiance. Almost the first person Constantia saw on entering was Donna Dundas, the second was Featherston. Not that they were together; Donna was smiling with quite an ineffable sweetness at the Italian, Coronis, and Featherston was leaning against the opposite wall. His eyes were upon her.

There were, however, so many other people in the small stone hall that Constantia, bewildered at first by the bright glow, did not see where Featherston's gaze dwelt. A moment later he had roused himself, and was coming toward her.

"Our dance, I think," he said, coldly.

She started. Had so much time flown? Had she indeed missed one of the dances she most desired?

"You had forgotten," went on Featherston, quite stiffly now. It is abominable to a man to find himself forgotten even for an instant by the woman who, he believes, loves him. "It hardly matters now," he said. "It is almost at an end."

Constantia grew pale. That first glance at the gay, smiling Donna had unnerved her; and now his coldness gave a finishing touch to the suppressed agitation that was troubling her.

"It was not that I forgot," she said, "only—" She hesitated. How could she go on? How explain?

"'Only.' Quite so," responded he, with a half-vailed sneer, and a glance at Stronge, who was not heeding him, but was rather regarding Mrs. Dundas with an amazed scrutiny. Had the woman no conscience—no heart? Here she was laughing, glowing, in all the insolence of her beauty, unmindful of that last scene in the garden that had crushed Constantia. She was making herself adorable to half a dozen admirers; notably to Coronis. She had even condescended to go further afield, and had drawn young George MacGillicuddy into her net. The boy was leaning over her in an attitude of exaggerated devotion.

Barry, however, held aloof from the siren of the hour. His manner did not exactly convey the idea that he was against her, but he certainly was not on her side. Constantia noted this, and was in a manner glad of it, though an instant later even this comfort forsook her; Barry, seeing her, turned upon her a scowling brow, and a glance full of concentrated wrath and reproach. It was a momentary gleam; it disappeared again as she went back to his conversation with Mrs. Ronayne-Power, a little woman with sharp, refined features, and a reputation for saying such nasty things of her neighbors that she was immensely petted by them in consequence.

"Not a bit of it," she was saying now, in her clear staccato voice that always made itself heard, apropos of the latest married scandal in the county. "There was no hurry about it. She was never in a hurry, if you remember. It appears that as far back as last January, she had all her arrangements made for the elopement with the major, even to the giving away of her old things. She had had an entirely new trousseau ordered for him, though the first was only three years old. However, at the last moment, her husband, as you know, got the small-pox."

"Anything so considerate!" murmured Donna.

"Inconsiderate she thought it, as she had a trumpery sort of a conscience somewhere. She was good-natured, always, and she made up her mind to give him a final spell of nursing before deserting him forever; she therefore told Major Blackwood she could not possibly start on her honey-moon with him, until she had seen the old man safely through his illness."

"And the major of course, very wisely declined to go a-honey-mooning with a young woman fresh from a tainted atmosphere," put in Donna, flippantly.

"Oh, as for a taint more or less," said Mrs. Ronayne-Power, with a shrug of her shoulders, "that could hardly harm her. She was well enough off in that line. As for Major Blackwood you wrong him. He was so infatuated by that little wretch, that he declared publicly he envied her husband his small-pox, considering she was going to nurse him. And nurse him she did, night and day; got highly complimented by the physicians for her wifely devotion, was held up to the entire parish by the rector as a sample of what a woman should be; and the very morning she got her husband down-stairs for the first time as a convalescent, she made a clean bolt of it with the major."

"Bless my stars!" exclaimed Barry. "It is the oddest thing I ever heard of, if it happened—so. She is a regular heroine."

"Of a rather irregular story," put in Stronge, who was annoyed.

"A Christian martyr in my estimation," said Donna, with a yawn.

Quite a little concert of praise and blame arose, that Featherston, in his usual cynical way, brought to an end.

"There uisn't a sound idea in the whole of that tale," he said, languidly. "Not one, I assure you. I should know."

"Why should you know?" demanded Barry, with studied politeness but a truculent eye. He was in the mood just then that made him intolerant to any man upon whom Constantia might have chanced to cast a favoring eye.

"For various reasons," returned the other coolly. "At all events, I know this much; that she left her husband, not because of his years, or the major, but because she had been delicately reared and she couldn't stand snuff. He took it by the spoonful, I'm told; she is now living—by herself, recollect—somewhere on the Riviera."

"I'm glad she chose a nice quiet spot, where English tourists don't intrude," said Donna, making a faint grimace.

"Do you mean to say she hasn't gone off at all?" asked a pretty woman, leaning forward out of the background; she seemed interested, and in a degree disappointed. She was thinking of going off herself, and was grieved in that she could not count on some one who had given her a lead.

"Be comforted. She has," said Mrs. Ronayne—Power, with a sneer. "If not in a coach and four with her major, at least in her good looks. I saw her just before she started for that solitary trip toi the Riviera that good Mr. Featherston would persuade us about, and her neck was a perfect picture—of bones. It was at Lady Vaughan's, and all the men fought shy of her. One couldn't wonder. She was so thin that I should think it would hurt one to dance with her. Even Massereene—you know the sort of man he is, and the sort of woman he likes—even he never went near her all the night."

"What luck for her!" said Stronge, in a peculiar tone.

"I saw her, too," cried Barry, laughing; "when you spoke of bones I remembered. She was the woman 'mit nodings on' who danced all night with Petersham, and who—"

"'Sh! No! Put your head in a bag," whispered the pretty woman, nudging him cautiously; "that was Mrs. Burke, cousin of Featherston's. You'll let yourself in for something if you don't look out."

"In spite of the bones, the major was faithful," went on Mrs. Ronayne-Power, with a view to crushing Featherston's view of the scandal.

"There is nothing like constancy," said George MacGillicuddy, with a fond glance at Donna.

"Nothing indeed. It is the rarest virtue we have," agreed Featherston, directing a withering one at Constantia, who met it and replied to it silently but eloquently. Her large eyes filled with tears.

"Well, I guess I must be going," said the pretty woman, rising to her feet. She had a lovely figure, so she rose slowly. "My old Dragon is disgracefully lively to-night, so I must be on the move. I had hoped the lobster mayonnaise and the dry Monopole would have been too much for him, but he has survived all, and is now considerably on the champ. Good-night, good folks. Better luck next time—for me, at all events."

"I say! Don't go yet," said Mrs. Ronayne-Power, persuasively. She knew there would be a row if the pretty woman stayed, so she did her best to keep her.

"Ain't good enough!" said the pretty woman, with a faint laugh. "Last time I tried that on, the consequences were grewsome. I dare say," carelessly, "you all remember. I flatly refused to move upon the homeward track, whereupon that dear old thing whose name I bear, hauled me off my seat before an appreciative audience! To risk it again would mean murder."

"Oh, he wouldn't go so far as that!" said Mrs. Ronayne-Power, reassuringly.

"No, but I should. As it is," with a languid smile, "I expect he has hauled me off my seat for good and all. I shan't resume it." She nodded briskly all round, and, escorted by a man on her left, strolled out of sight.

Donna looked after her with an inscrutable smile upon her lips. "What a fool that woman was! Could she not manage her little affairs with more decency than that? Cajolery! Had she no knowledge of the unlimited power of that great agent?"

She, too, rose.

"This dance is now almost at an end," she said, "so I presume I may in safety return to the ball-room. I was engaged for it to some half dozen or so, so thought it was wise to go into retirement until it blew over. Mr. Barry, you will give me your arm?"

She smiled winningly upon him. She preferred Barry at this moment to any other man, because she could see he did not prefer her in any way.

Featherston, as if nettled, turned aside. He had approached her by a foot or so, as if to speak, but now he drew back. He went up to Constantia instead. It seemed to him on the instant that the innocent, unsophisticated girl was infinitely the more desirable of the two.

"As we missed that last dance," he said, with a friendly smile, "I hope you will give this instead. It is only a square dance, indeed; but still half a loaf, you know, is better—sometimes—than no bread."

Constantia crimsoned and then grew pale. She clasped her hands nervously.

"I am so sorry," she stammered; "but—but I have promised it to—"

"I see," interrupted he, coldly. "You are determined, then, to deny me! No, do not trouble yourself to explain who it is. I can understand. But to be cast aside for him a second time to-night seems—"

"You are wrong," she cried, eagerly; "quite wrong. This dance belongs to Mr. Dundas. He does not dance anything except the squares, and his asking me was such a special sort of thing that—"

Stronge, who was standing at a distance, could see but not hear, and he hoped honestly that those apparently angry words would end in a settled coldness. But, even, as he hoped, he knew it was in vain. Featherston had met the girl's anxious eyes, had seen the tears in them (raised by him for the second time), and had been subdued thereby. There was always something about Constantia that held him captive au fond, however his thoughts might wander (occasionally and most unworthily) here and there, amongst the more experienced beauties of his world.

He bent over her now, and his voice sunk to a whisper—a rather loving one.

"You have been unkind," he said; "you must acknowledge that. And yet—I believe you!"

Constantia smiled at him through her tears; to speak was beyond her. She knew that she was unutterably happy; she felt that he had forgiven her. And he looked so handsome, so aristocratic; his eyes were so full of feeling, his nose so ducal, that she knew she was right in being happy. And yet why did he haunt the footsteps of Mrs. Dundas? Why did he so often look at her? Garrett Barry, Mr. Stronge—they did not show the reigning beauty such open devotion. And yet how superior he was to either of them! He had seemed eager to make up the small quarrel with her (Constantia), and yet, did he love her? Did—did she love him?

She fell into a sound sleep that night without answering either question.

CHAPTER XV.

The following Sunday Constantia rose with alacrity, and donned her prettiest gown, which was becoming, though decidedly elderly; still, she looked well in it, which compensated for for many things. Her eyes were bright, her lips smiling, as she surveyed herself in her glass. She listened to Norah's fond ravings with a benign expression. To-day she would see Featherston!

There was never any doubt of that? He was a good man, whose pew never never knew him absent; and his very pose, the devotional bend of his body, the strict watch his eye kept upon his prayer-book as though fearing anything in it might escape him endeared him to the rector, and raised him in the minds of all—notably of Lord Killeens, who always made a point of tucking his arm into Featherston's after service, and tottering down the graveled walk with him, maundering about the chances for and against Home Rule. In spite of his age and senility, he had considerable influence, and a would-be M. P. could see many reasons for posing creditably before him, and listening without signs of weariness to the maundering.

It was a heavenly day just bordering upon June. Inside the church, indeed, the heat was almost oppressive. Some of the windows wouldn't open at all, and the rest only about half an inch or so, the consequence being that presently everybody felt a little stifled. Mrs. Dundas waved a huge fan vigorously to and fro, and made private bets with herself as to how long Miss MacGillicuddy would sustain her rigid position without so much as winking an eyelid. She varied this gay amusement by occasional glances at Lord Varley, who always caught and returned them—which, of course was honest of him. He sat alone in his pew, Lady Varley being at home with the poor little baby, who was not so well to-day.

The curate read the prayers in his loud, slow voice. It was so slow that the congregation, getting impatient, were rather in advance of him. He was English, which did not endear him to the farming classes, and his accent was quite beyond their comprehension. The sun's hot rays poured through the windows on the men's defenseless heads, and suggested slumber as a thing to be encouraged. They began to nod.

"The young lions do lark, and suffer hunger!"

This bit of the psalm struck them as being new and skittish, and with one consent they roused themselves and applied themselves vigorously to the discovery of it in their books. They did not find it. "Luck" was the nearest thing they could get to it. The curate's ultra-English accent had once again misled them. They were annoyed, and fumed a good deal, so that sleep fled from their eyelids. A few of them who had not disbelieved, or sought knowledge from the Church Service, thought it was all right, and very proper that young lions, if dissipated, should afterwards pay the penalty of their crimes by going through a course of starvation.

The psalms came to an end, so did the lessons. Presently the wheezy organ set up its pipes, and the hymn was given out. It was, as usual, "Blow ye the trumpet, blow."

The old woman who called herself the organist struck a quavering chord or two; the old woman who had the presumption to lead the choir gave way to a grewsome sound that was meant for F sharp. It was, however, F natural, in spite of the music, and very bad at that. The organ continued its key, she continued hers, the two or three timid young girls who alone could be induced to join in the performance followed suit, and as they sung exactly one note behind each other, the harmony was perfect.

Mrs. Dundas, who was not musical, laughed a little, Constantia frowned. The first note conquered, the line was given, "Blow ye the trumpet—blow, ho, ho—ho, ho!" the ancient leader and the timid girls lingered lovingly on the last "ho," and were just pausing to take breath for a fresh outburst when—

What was it? Every one jumped a foot or two off the ground, and turned in a body to stare at the huge crimson curtain that hung over the doorway, presumably to keep out a draught. There was indeed, a general bounce all round.

Good heavens! what was it? A sound only; but an ear-piercing one; a stirring blast; a shrill blast that seemed to shake the very foundations of the edifice, and make the rafters ring, and cause the guilty ones to tremble in their shoes, as awful warnings about the last day awoke within their breasts. One or two decrepit old people, who were unable to stand during the vocal performances, fell off their seats and rolled under them. What could that sound be but the last trump? and how should one meet it save on one's face and hands? They were ultimately picked up by their grandchildren considerably the worse for wear.

It was certainly a trumpet, and blown by one with super-human lungs! This all men knew. Mr. Roche, the rector, came out from behind the altar-rails, and looked daggers at the unoffending curtain from whence the iniquitous sound had come. Even yet the echo of it resounded through the sacred place. The walls were providentially stronger than those of Jericho, because they stood the shock bravely, and remained firm.

There was a silence for a full minute, and then one of the school-children began to cry. He did it out loud and shamelessly; in fact, it was a perfect bellow. He was ignominiously put out by the ear by the indignant sexton, but his yells broke through the awkward and angry pause of the rector. The latter presently resumed the service, but there was no more music on that day. The organist and the leader had both been carried home by the timid girls, both in strong hysterics.

Barry, when he found what he had done, and when the first burst of wild laughter was at an end, was rather frightened. He was more than that; as he recalled to himself the rector's face as seen by him through a hole in the curtain, he was contrite. He lurked about the precincts of the churchyard until the sermon had come to an end, and then went straight to the rector's study and confessed his sins.

(To Be Continued.)

ROSEBERY IN ACTION.

Here is a pen picture of Lord Rosebery as a public speaker: "Addressing the company for fifty-five minutes, his manner was unusually animated. He had pushed his chair well back, and, though he never struck the table, as Mr. Gladstone was so very fond of doing, he sometimes rested his hands on it, sometimes spread them out to emphasize a point, at one time thrust them in his coat pockets, at another hooked them into his waistpocket, and never for a moment was still."

LONDON'S MEAT BILL.

The annual meat bill of London is something wonderful. During the year 1895 the butchers of that burg killed and sold the flesh of 40,000 cattle, 1,600,000 sheep, 500,000 calves and 700,000 hogs, to say nothing of the horses and fowls.

THE EIGHTH WONDER.

Mr. Winks—I see raising flowers for the manufacture of perfumery has become a new industry.

Mr. Minks (a perfumery manufacturer)—Flowers?

Yes.

For the manufacture of perfumery?

Yes.

Well, wonders will never cease

ABOUT FAMOUS PEOPLE.

ANECDOTES ABOUT WELL-KNOWN MEN AND WOMEN.

Queen Victoria's Working Hours—Mikado of Japan and His Ancestors—An Expensive Trousseau—Queen Margherita and Divorce—Dr. Nansen and His Wife, &c., &c.

Mr. Jerome K. Jerome says: "The one thing that kept my first novel from making a sensation is that no one read it."

The Duchess of Marlborough will make her first public appearance in England at Oxford on June 3, when Her Grace will open a bazaar on behalf of the Oxford Labor Home.

The most expensive trousseau on record is that of the late Empress of China, whose marriage took place a few years ago. The trousseau cost $5,250,000, one-third of the money coming from the Imperial revenue, the rest from the empire.

Last year Queen Victoria signed her name to some fifty thousand documents. At Buckingham or Windsor Her Majesty practically never has a holiday. At 8.30 she begins work for the day, and it is continued, with intermission for meals and a drive, till midnight.

In the matter of ancestors the Mikado of Japan can entirely discountenance all other sovereigns. The present Mikado is the 122nd of his line, and members of his family have occupied the throne of Japan for the last 2,500 years. The founder of this dynasty was contemporary with Nebuchadnezzar, 660 B. C. Of the seven great religions enumerated by Max Muller as possessing Bibles, the Mikado's family is older than five.

The German Emperor has never been crowned; neither was his father, Emperor Frederick. In the case of the present Kaiser, the ceremony was omitted for economical reasons. Emperor Frederick died before there could be any talk of a coronation, though whether it would have taken place, even had the Emperor lived, is doubtful. Prussian Kings have the right to crown themselves if they wish it, and the privilege of dispensing with the ceremony if it is preferable. Kaiser Wilhelm I. was probably crowned because he was not the direct heir to the throne, being the son of Friedrich Wilhelm III. Friedrich Wilhelm IV. had no sons.

Queen Margherita of Italy does not believe in divorce, and wishes it distinctly understood that divorced women need expect no social recognition at her court. At the time when Sig. Crispi was first in power not only were his two divorced wives still living, but also Donna Lina's (Crispi's wife's) divorced husband. For a long time Her Majesty would not hear of having this lady at her court, but when she was finally forced to yield to the pressure put upon her to admit Donna Lina to the Quirinal receptions she did so in these words: "Very well! Tell Sig. Crispi that I will receive his wife, but I will receive only one of them, and it must always be the same one!"

The Pope celebrated his eighty-sixth birthday on March 2, and the eighteenth of his reign, he having been crowned on March 3, 1878. Almost the first act of the Pontiff, after becoming the head of the Roman Church, was to send away all the women members of families residing at the Vatican. The Pope objected to the presence of women on his premises, a sit might give rise to unfriendly criticism on the part of strangers visiting the Vatican. At the time of His Holiness's accession a popular caricaturist depicted the Pope's sceptre as a mighty broom sweeping the Vatican walls of the retainers and hangers-on who had collected there during the easy-going days of Pio Nono.

Dr. Fridtjof Nansen began making his experiments in the far North when he was about twenty-one years of age. Apart from his reputation as an intrepid explorer he is a recognized authority in many departments of zoology, and his published papers on various anatomatical subjects are of considerable interest and importance. Mrs. Nansen, like most Norwegian women, whether they need it for a livelihood or not, works hard. She gives lessons in music and sings in public. Before their marriage Dr. Nansen and his fiancee agreed that their mode of life should not be changed—that he should not abandon his explorations and that she should continue her teaching.

When Sir John Millais was a student at the Royal Academy he rejoiced in the friendship of a fellow-student by the name of Potherd. Potherd, among other eccentricities, affected a long blue cloak with a catskin collar, which he wore on all occasions. Millais was still struggling with his charcoal when "Boy Blue" left the Academy and set up as a full-fledged artist, and the friends thus became separated. Millais had achieved fame and painted some world-renowned pictures before he met his old friend again. Walking down the streets of Camden Town one day Sir John saw a figure in a long blue cloak trudging along before him. "Surely," said Millais, "I know that cloak; it must be Potherd." Quickening his step, he called out: "Hallo! Potherd, how are you?" "And who may you be?" said "Boy Blue." "I am Millais; don't you remember me?" "Not little Johnny Millais, surely?" said the shabby Potherd, surveying the well-groomed Sir John. "Judging by your appearance, Millais, I should say you had given the arts the go-by. What do you do for a living?" "Paint," groaned Sir John, thinking what a very local thing fame is, after all.

KEEP A SCRAP-BOOK.

Every merchant should keep a scrap-book. This suggestion has been made before, but it is fully worth emphasizing. Each bright advertisement that you notice in your local paper or those of other towns; every model advertisement that you observe in your trade paper, and every practical trade-bringing plan or hint, should be cut out and pasted in the book, with full data as to the name and date of the paper. You will find such a book as this an inexhaustible treasury of riches, especially on those days when your ideas run scarce, and you are too busy to take time to evolve a good advertisement.