LORD KILLEEN'S REVENGE

CHAPTER XXXVIII—(Continued)

"Why he went on Saturday—three days ago," said Barry. "Odd you hadn't heard. He won't be home until to-morrow. And even so," with a reproachful glance at her, "you needn't pretend to me that you think he wouldn't be glad to see you at any time, under any circumstances." Then a light dawned upon him. "Ah! you're afraid he might object to your being escorted by me," he said, with all the sapient air of one who has grasped by chance a truth.

"Why should he object? What have you got in your head now in lieu of brains?" demanded Constantia, with a stamp of her pretty foot. She knew Stronge was watching her, and this rendered her the more indignant. "I only thought that— But you are not worth an argument," she broke off with a nervous little laugh.

"Still, the gardens, Con! And I hear they are lovely now," entreated Norah, coaxingly. She slipped her hand round her sister's waist, and gazed with tender entreaty into her eyes. "And if he is away from home," she said.

"Well, let us go, then," said Constantia. She took Norah's hand, and held it tightly, and she adroitly changed her position, so that Stronge no longer walked at one side of her. The little sister now divided them. Perhaps she had divined his analysis of her motives a moment since, and resented it. Perhaps his deep, earnest gaze had embarrassed her. At all events she had elected to punish him, and instinct told her that the surest way to do that was to withdraw herself from him. It was only a yard or two as it happened, but "oh! the difference to him!"

They all went on again, presumably as though nothing had occurred to disturb the happy harmony of a while ago, but silence fell upon them. Even Norah ceased her interminable chatter. Not a word escaped them as they skirted the avenue, and presently emerged upon a low, level bit of sward close to the range of windows that belonged to the library, billiard-room, smoking-room, and the little den where Mr. Featherston was popularly supposed to meditate on godly deeds, to make up his clothing club and other charitable accounts, and where, according to Barry, he was in the habit of saying his prayers.

"It must be awkward for him now," he said, as they came to a standstill opposite the windows of the "Den," to let Norah pluck a flower that had taken her fancy. "He must miss the oratory. But perhaps he sets up his closet wherever he goes. A galvanized iron affair would not cost much, and would be invaluable to one so earnest. He might pitch it on the nearest goose-green, and hold a Blue Ribbon meeting in it. That would delight the innocent villagers; the house that moved would fill them with awe. They would go down before it. His list of teetotallers would be filled to overflowing. He will create quite a sensation in Fer— Ah!"

The ejaculation dropped from him involuntarily. He changed color. His gaze was riveted upon the window of the room where the young man was supposed to wrestle with the higher powers for the subjugation of drunkenness in the village; and lo, and behold, what he saw there was the good young man himself!

His companions followed his gaze, and were electrified in turn. To come face to face with a person, you have good reason for believing to be many miles away, is always a shock, more or less. It was decidedly more to Constantia in this instance, as she would not have been seen by Featherston so close to his house for anything that could be offered her. They were all so astounded that no one spoke, even when Featherston had abstracted the paper from the davenport in the window and had moved aside out of their sight. Not for long however. Before Constantia had sufficiently recovered herself to arrange for a hasty retreat, Featherston reappeared again with a tumbler in his hand.

"The holy boy is going to mix himself a modest seidlitz," Barry could not refrain from muttering, unable to let a chance of sneering at his rival go by.

Featherston had moved away again, and again returned; and what was this he now held?

Constantia gazed as if fascinated at this new object in the picture. She felt she was growing very pale and that her hands were trembling. Was her last belief in him to be now rudely shattered—here—to-day?

It was a long-necked bottle of goodly proportions. By no means an empty bottle. It was three quarters full of a liquid of pale gold color. It seemed to those looking on that they could, even at that distance, read the word cognac upon it.

Mr. Featherston, who evidently ignored the superior charms of a decanter, eyed the ordinary brandy bottle with a friendly glance, and pulling the cork from it, proceeded to pour its contents into the tumbler until the latter was quite half full—generous measurement allowed. To lift it to his lips after this and drink it with an unmistakeable relish, seemed a simple matter to this apostle of temperance! Who ran could read that there was a lasting love between the man and the bottle.

"Come, come," whispered Constantia, hoarsely, turning piteous eyes on Stronge. It seemed t ohim—who understood a great deal, and yet not quite all—a marvelously strange thing that it should be to him she came for help in this trial, which, after all, had he but known it, was not so severe a one. It was, however, the final wrench.

She put out her hand to him in her distress. He caught it—how gladly, she could not know—and with one consent, they all turned and fled the spot, and ran back toward the wood. In silence they made their way, until they came to a tiny dell, secluded, moss-grown, living in the very heart of the swaying trees; and here they stopped, out of breath a little, and looked one upon the other. No one spoke.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

When the silence had grown positively awful, Norah broke it.

"Well, I never!" she said, simply, but largely.

Neither did any one else, evidently. There was no dissentient voice. One could see that they were something embarrassed with each other, by the way in which they avoided each other's eyes. Constantia tried to make a remark, but failed; so did Stronge; and then all at once they became aware that something was the matter with Barry.

He was purple! He was writhing, wriggling, in the most extraordinary way, and then the crisis came. He burst into a roar of laughter.

Long and loud he laughed, with a most indecent disregard for public opinion. He was past caring for that. He flung himself indeed upon the mossy sward as though he could no longer support his limbs, and abandoned himself ecstatically to the mirth that had been consuming him for the last five minutes.

Stronge regarded him with extreme severity for a little while, and then, overcome no doubt by his evil example, gave in, and broke into exuberant laughter likewise. Even the fear of Constantia's wrath was powerless to control him. Norah was not long in following suit. Delighted with a chance of cackling at all times, she saw no wa splendid opportunity not to be neglected, and gave her mirth full swing without a thought for the morrow, and a sister's displeasure.

As for Constantia, she stood stern and uncompromising, gazing at her companions with careful contempt. But after a bit her strength, she found, was insufficient for her. Had this revelation come a month ago, before the disclosures on the night of that fatal masked ball, all would have been different; believing Featherston still true, she would have felt crushed, humiliated, heart-broken. But now!

Now they were all laughing; and she was young, she was Irish, she was pretty. It was but a fleshwound, after all, she had received in her first encounter. In spite of a keen struggle with her severer self, the stern lines about her soft lips relaxed, the gravity died from her eyes, and was replaced by a sparkling light that told its own tale. She made one last fight for composure, and then, vanquished, yet without regret for her defeat, she joined in the general merriment, and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks.

"That's right," said Stronge, with a quick sense of relief as he watched her. Was there a glimmer of hope in the relief?

"Oh, but—" she said, looking up at him. "It is dreadful, is it not? Oh, we should not be laughing—"

"After all, why not?" said Stronge. "There is an element of comicality somewhere around, and we are all infected by it. There is surely no harm in that."

"Garrett, he is calling you names," said Norah, saucily. "He says you are a comical element. It was you who made us laugh, wasn't it?"

"Well, I don't fancy I was the first cause," said Barry. "I was only the useful but insignificant match. Better be laughing than crying any day. Featherston ought to be the crying, naughty boy. By Jove, what a swindle!" Here he went off again.

"I wish we hadn't gone up there to-day," said Constantia, nervously. "You must confess we behaved meanly, shamefully, to spy upon him through his own windows, to detect him—"

"Drinking whisky, with that blue ribbon pinned upon his coat! That's what I call mean and shameful," interrupted Norah, with a little sniff.

"Brandy, my dear," corrected Barry. "Don't belie him."

"Was it brandy? Really?" asked Norah, in an awe-struck tone.

"The best, I have no doubt," said Barry.

"That makes it worse, then," said Norah. "Aunt Bridget is always saying that brandy is ever so much wickeder than whisky."

"Your aunt Bridget knows what's what," returned Barry, solemnly. "Take my advice, and stick to her dark sayings until your hair is gray."

"Oh, I hope he didn't see us," said Constantia, miserably. She looked so pale and terrified that once again Stronge's heart was contracted by a bitter pang of jealousy. Once again despair took up its dwelling there. Women, he knew, had been faithful through much before Constantia's time—perhaps she would be! He was ignorant, however of that little scene at Donna Dundas's ball, where masks hid faces and where hearts spoke the truth. A woman can forgive most things, but disloyalty demands vengeance.

"To do him justice he doesn't squint, and it would have been impossible otherwise to see us and the bottle at the same time," said Barry, who was determined not to take it seriously. "He gave the preference to the bottle." Then he looked amused again. "If he had seen us, I wonder what he would have done," he said.

"Prayed for death," said Stronge with conviction.

"Oh, when I think of that blue ribbon!" cried Norah indignantly. "And it was the biggest piece of ribbon in the parish. Oh the hypocrite! Connie, how shall we ever speak to him again?"

"You must do nothing, you must not even hint at it. It would be base, dishonorable," said Constantia vehemently. "Norah, do you hear me? You must do nothing, you must let this thing pass from your mind as though it had never been."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Norah scornfully, who had not yet learned that you may think it any uncivilized language you like, but that you must speak in proper English. "Do you suppose I could forget what we saw to-day? Could you?"

Constantia turned a sorrowful glance upon her little sister, but answer she made none. Never indeed would she forget this day. Her last belief in one she could have loved was shattered, the pity had given place to-day to a supreme contempt. But in all this there was sadness.

"It never occurred to me," said Stronge slowly.

"It did to me," said Barry. "I'm a dull fellow enough, but some instinct stood to me, and told me to mistrust him. This craze for total abstinence was all a plant to get himself into the good graces of Lord Killeens, who can give him a push in the parliamentary direction next election. Bah! it makes one sick to think of it."

"Come home!" said Constantia, suddenly. She looked distressed, and her hands were trembling. A thought had come to her. "If he should happen to walk this way—to meet us. It might happen." She did not say how often of late he had come through the wood this way to call at The Cottage, and how often she had rushed by the back door into the tiny orchard behind the house to give some color to the servant's answer, "Not at home." "Oh, hurry!" she cried, looking appealingly at Stronge. "If I met him now I could not speak to him—I couldn't indeed, and he might guess—"

Her very lips grew pale at the dreadful thought. Barry sprung to his feet, and they all followed Connie's eager footsteps back toward The Cottage. Just where the wood terminated, and open fields that belonged to her home, she dismissed her companions.

"Norah and I will go home alone the rest of the way. Yes, please," seeing that Barry was about to protest, the hour being late and the twilight dull. "As you know," with a faint smile at him, "Aunt Bridget is not altogether in her loveliest mood to-day, and to see you again—you both," hastily including Stronge, and blushing warmly at her indiscretion, "would—would—"

"Don't mind me," said Barry, sweetly, "I'm not worth that blush; nor is the occasion. To know one's self unbeloved by Miss MacGillicuddy might cause some men acute misery; it only causes me joy unspeakable. However, as I am your servant always, Constantia, to do or die in your service, I shall bid you good-bye here."

"Don't take things so much to heart," said Stronge, in a low voice, as he took her hand in parting. "Nothing is worth much grief."

Yet, how he had grieved! How he would grieve forever for the love denied him! He put aside his own feelings for the moment, and spoke this worldly sentiment to try to heal her wound. He was considerably perplexed by the strange look with which she answered him.

"Is that your creed?" she said slowly.

"At least it is a good one," he returned evasively.

He and Barry, having kissed good-night to Norah, turned into a path that led sharply to the right and were soon out of sight. Constantia with a quick sigh, went on through the wood, hardly heeding the lively Norah's chatter that never for a moment ceased. Toward the end of the path a thick bit of shrubbery grew, and as they entered it, both started, as a tall, dark figure stepped out of the rhododendrons, right in front of them.

CHAPTER XL.

Constantia shrunk back involuntarily as if frightened, and laid her hand on Norah's arm. That little heroine, however, was not to be daunted. She went straight up to the dark figure, and peered into its face.

Lord Killeen's Revenge.

"Why, it's Kitty!" she said then, in a tone of distinct disappointment; a tone that bordered on disgust; to be so near to the finding of a real bogey, and to have it turn out nothing after all! "What are you doing, Kitty?" she demanded, with an air of asperity.

A face had emerged from the long black coat that Irish married women always wear; a face young and pretty. One could see that the cloak had been borrowed. The girl looked past Norah at Constantia, in a timid, uncertain fashion.

"Miss Connie," she said, "could I spake to ye for a moment, if ye plaze?"

The cloak had fallen back altogether now, and betrayed the dove-colored cachemire gown and muslin apron that formed the female livery at Araglin. Constantia saw that it was Kitty Brian, the underhousemaid there, a girl to whom Lady Varley had been specially kind, taking her out of a poverty-stricken to train as a servant. The girl had returned this kindness by a passionate attachment, that grew with every gentle word from her gentle mistress.

"Lady Varley!" exclaimed Constantia, anxiously. "She is not ill? Has anything happened?"

"There is nothing, miss," said the girl, "nothing at all," with a rather forced smile. Her nervousness seemed to grow upon her. "It was only a little thrifle of my own I wanted to—to consult ye about. An' I thought if I met ye here in private," with an expressive glance at Norah (who read her, however, like a book), "you might listen to me."

"Certainly," said Constantia, gravely. "Norah, run on to the house, and if Aunt Bridget asks for me, say—say I am coming, and that I shall be in presently."

"I'll do better than that," said the good little Norah. "I'll idle around until I see you coming, or," fearing she may hurry her, "nearly coming, and then she can scold us both together, which," saucily, "will save time. Now, Kitty," with a scornful glance at that poor diplomatist, "you can tell your secrets in comfort, as you have got rid of me."

She darted away like a swallow, leaving Constantia alone with the maid.

"Well," said the former, smiling kindly, "what is it? You have something to say to me?"

She like the girl, who had proved herself very devoted to Lady Varley during all the sad time of the poor little baby's illness and death, and prepared to listen sympathetically to any homely tale of trouble the girl might chance to tell.

"Yes, miss." The girl hesitated, and looked round her fearfully, and Constantia, whose surprise was growing, could not fail to mark the pallor of her lips, and the terror that depicted itself on every feature.

"There is bad news, Miss Connie," she said at last; and then again paused, with a swift glance around her into the thickening gloom. "Oh, if I should be overheard!" she said.

"No one can hear you in this out-of-the-way spot," returned Constantia, calmly, though her heart was beginning to beat with the expectation of some unknown but surely coming evil. "What is it, Kitty? Speak at once. Something has happened."

"No, no, miss; not yet. But—but what I'm afeard of is that it will happen unless there is some one to prevent it. Miss Connie," in a low, urgent tone, "swear to me you'll not bethray that I was the one to spake, of what I'm now goin' to tell ye."

"I swear it," said Constantia, without hesitation. And then, quickly, "Lady Varley is in danger—trouble?"

"Ay, Miss. 'Twill be sad trouble for her if no one can help. But you, Miss MacGillicuddy, you can do something. That's why I came to ye. For two long days and nights," cried the girl, in low but excited tones, "this secret has lain upon my heart, until I told myself I should spake of it or die."

"Speak, then," said Constantia, with a touch of impatience; "what is this terrible thing that threatens your mistress?"

"My lord—" began the girl, and then stopped abruptly as if frightened.

Constantia drew back. She flushed crimson.

"It is impossible that I should listen to complaints of Lord Varley," she said, haughtily. "I thought you too respectable a girl for this sort of thing. Do you think your mistress would like to have the petty unpleasantnesses of her household publicly canvassed?"

She moved as though to pass the girl by; but Kitty Brian laid her hand upon her arm and held her firmly.

"Miss Constantia, don't go like that. Hear me," she cried, dropping on her knees and catching Constantia's skirts. "You know—don't ye, now miss?—that I would sell my heart's blood for the misthress. 'Tis for my lady that I beg, here on my knees. I thought you loved her, so I came to you. Oh, miss, if you will not listen, who will? What friend has she upon earth when—her own man is false to her?"

The voice was so tragical, so passionately in earnest, the girl's face so white with honest emotion, that Constantia felt her nerve fail. If, any real misfortune threatened Lady Varley, what should she do? She entertained for her so warm an affection that she stood now almost paralyzed by this sudden baleful light that had been thrown across her brain. That Lord Varley had been wild, foolish, culpable, she knew; but that word "false," and the girl's impassioned manner—

"Do you know what you are saying?" she murmured, faintly.

"Ay, miss; and the grief that lies in my words for her. God be good to us all! We want it sorely when the very closest to us may be the one to work us the worst evil!"

"All that you say makes only vague hints," cried Constantia, vehemently. "You must explain fully, entirely. Tell me at once exactly what you mean."

"Listen, then, miss. Ye heard, may be, that Misther Dundas went to London about a week ago?"

"Yes."

"May be, though, ye haven't heard that ever since his goin', my lord has been mornin', noon, an' night up there at Ballymore wid Mrs. Dundas?"

"This is all probably idle gossip."

"It's not, miss!" with an eloquent gesture. "Don't ye be led from the truth by such rubbish as that. He goes to see Mrs. Dundas. More shame for her!" she broke out, in a burst of honest indignation.

"He may have had business," persisted Constantia. But she felt her feebleness.

"Business, is it? An' what business has he wid any one but his own wife? Arrah! Miss Connie, now, an' is it defendin' him ye'd be? An' I that could have sworn ye were all for my lady!"

"If you have only to tell me of Lord Varley's visits to Mrs. Dundas, who is a very old friend of his," began Constantia, coldly, "I—"

"Ah! but that isn't all, miss," said the girl, sadly. "'Tis only the beginnin' of it. Look here; this is how it stands. Mr. Dundas has been gone a week; he is not to be home for another fortnight, an' when he comes he won't find a wife before him. She's goin' to leave him for Lord Varley!"

"Oh, no, no! What horrible story is this?" cried Constantia, putting up her hands as if to ward off some hateful thing.

"'Tis thrue, miss, for all that," said the girl, mournfully. "Thrue as ye stand there. This is Tuesday, an' for Thursday they have it all settled to run away." She threw her arms wide, and then suddenly brought her hands together with a loud clap, and burst into tears. "Oh, wirra, wirra! an' what will become of my lady thin?" she sobbed, frantically.

Constantia was too horrified to have much patience with her wild grief.

"Stop crying," she said, imperiously, "and listen to me. Have you proofs? Is there no doubt about all this—disgraceful story?"

"Sorra doubt, miss." The girl was still sobbing, but some indignation came into her tone. She turned on Constantia. "Dy'e think I wouldn't have more dacency than to mintion the matter at all, if there wasn't a necessity for it?" she said. "It's all arranged, I tell ye. By starting on Thursday, they'll have a good run before Mr. Dundas has learned the truth. Oh, it will be the ruin entirely of my lady! Such a shame to her, an' before all the world, too! Oh, miss, if you can do anything, do it!"

Constantia was sunk in thought. So this was the end of Donna's wiles! An intense loathing for her beautiful cousin, that seemed to chill her through and through, crept over her until she felt that she was shivering, not only in soul but body. Oh, the pretty phrases of her, the plausible words, the soft, seductive laugh! Oh, that she could tell her what she thought of her! That she could make her feel, if only for the first and last time of her life!

She drew her breath hard with a kind of sob, as she again turned to the anxious girl.

"And you," she said, looking down on her, "how did you learn all this?"

Kitty fidgeted.

"Why, there's Dinny Murphy up at Ballymore," she said at last.

"I see. I understand. He is your sweetheart—your lover?"

"Why we do be keepin' company sometimes," said the girl, plucking shyly at her apron. "But faix, I don't think, miss, that there's much in it."

She cast a glance at Constantia out of her eloquent Irish eyes, as she said this, that belied her assertion, and compelled Constantia to believe that there was all the world in it so far as she was concerned.

"May be ye think I should have held my tongue in spite of what I know. May be 'tis blamin' me ye are for spakin' at all," she said presently, puzzled by Constantia's pained silence. "But fegs, miss, dear, I couldn't see the misthress worsted widout sain' a word to somebody who might give her a hand. An' by luck, miss, it sthruck me that you were the very one to do her a good turn. Miss Connie," she came closer and took Constantia's hand, and lifted it respectfully, and pressed it to her lips, "do something. Do now! I'm a poor, ignorant girl, an' no one would listen to me, or I'd stand up before Father Jerry himself, an' cry it through the parish as a sin an' a shame, if I thought 'twould do any good to my lady. Oh, miss! to see the face of her, so sad, an' so lonely, as if all the world was asthray wid her! If even the baby had been left her—"

Here she broke off and began to cry bitterly. The little child had been very dear to her. Many and many an hour she had walked up and down the nursery floor at midnight, hushing its weak cries, and soothing it into the lethargy that often passed for sleep.

"Do not think of that, do not go back to it," cried Constantia hurriedly, a pang at her heart. "I will try what I can do, I promise you; and I am glad, Kitty, that you came to me—me only. No one"—she leaned forward impressively, and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder—"no one, remember, must know of this but you and I. Think of Lady Varley!"

"I think of nothing else, miss," replied the girl, sadly.

(To be Continued.)

STRANGEST OF ALL WEDDINGS.

Lion Tamer and Society Belle Married in a Lion's Cage in South Africa.

Immense, dignified lions and stately lionesses were the bridal attendants of a happy couple recently married in South Africa.

In a cage where half a dozen Kings of the Forest strode uneasily about and growled, the man swore to "love, cherish and protect," the woman, who pledged herself to "love, honor and obey." And when the ceremony was over the crowd gave three cheers that startled all the animals in the menagerie, and they excitedly began howling and screeching.

The deep roars of the lions, the shrill trumpeting of elephants, the screams of tigers and leopards, the chattering monkeys and the screeching of parrots all combined to form a wedding march such as never before greeted a bride and groom.

Bloomer weddings have become common, stage ceremonies are old, romantic young folks have been wedded in balloons and others have stood up in railroad trains to be united. In short, Hymen's bonds have been under almost all circumstances and in all surroundings. It is difficult to produce

A NOVEL WEDDING,

and some efforts in that line have been ludicrous. To be sure, a multi-millionaire may spend a fortune on the marriage of his daughter, and make it a novelty to that extent, but still it is novel in degree only and not in kind. It would seem that people would remember such an important event as their marriage any way, be it celebrated ever so modestly.

The scene of the latest novelty in marriages, which deserve the title of the most unusual marriage in the world, was in Johannesburg, South Africa.

For some time Fillis's circus has been touring through South Africa. One of the leading features of the show was the exhibition given by a cage of performing lions under the care of Herr August Windschermann, a handsome German, before whose glances the lions trembled and were obedient.

But those fierce eyes could send love messages when their owner willed, and Miss May Malraison, one of the belles of Johannesburg, fell a victim to them and blushingly said "Yes" when her stalwart lover asked her to become the wife of a lion tamer.

When the manager of the circus offered substantial inducements if the ceremony was performed

IN THE LION'S CAGE,

that arrangement was agreed to, although Miss Malraison at first demurred. But she wanted to be brave, as she was to get a brave husband, and she finally agreed to enter the den of lions to change her name and condition in life.

The circus tent was crowded the night of the ceremony. People struggled for advantageous positions, and they cheered the plucky bride as she entered the cage supported on the arm of the bridegroom.

"Will you come inside?" inquired Herr Windschermann of the minister, as he held the door invitingly open.

"I—I think not," said the reverend gentleman. "I will remain outside. It—it—is—too—too—crowded inside."

And so it was arranged. Standing inside the cage, with their hands clasped, the happy couple listened to the words that made them man and wife and gave the necessary responses as clearly as though they had been in a parlor or before the chancel rail of a church.

The bridegroom held a whip in his disingaged hand, and at times he glanced around at his fierce pets. Handing against the bars of the cage were several weapons convenient to his hand in case the lions should object to the presence of a stranger in their home. The lions behaved remarkably well. They had been decorated with flowers and ribbons, and they seemed to know that they were on their good behavior.

The bride wore a conventional bridal dress, but the bridegroom was attired in his usual garments. He was afraid the lions might not know him if he wore a full dress suit.

FENCING AS EXERCISE

Fencing is becoming a favorite form of exercise among women. Among its accomplished adepts are the young Princesses of Wales, Mrs. Langtry and several of the most graceful actresses of the English stage. Though the earlier lessons are supposed to be fatiguing, when once the knowledge has been acquired learners are always enthusiastic followers of this vigorous, healthy exercise.

LONDON REAL ESTATE.

A lot of land on Cornhill, in London, with a front of 21 feet, facing the Bank of England, was sold recently at a price equivalent to $12,260,000 an acre.