THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR

THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XVI.

Norah left Cyril, and walked homeward almost entirely happy. The only bar to her perfect happiness was the fact that she could go straight to the earl and tell him all that had happened.

She had a natural detestation for secrecy and deception, and she thought, with a sigh, how delightful it would have been if her mother or the faithful Catherine had been alive, to go to either of them and pour out her heart.

For it seemed to Norah, as she went through the sunlit woods and over the velvety lawns, that she was the most fortunate girl in the world. There had never been abother man since Adam was created like Cyril, and she stopped now and again, that she might recall his image and think of all he had said.

And it seemed to her that he had spoken, as he looked and behaved, like a hero. He had said that she might have married some man with a title; but to her he seemed the noblest of men, and it was just in harmony with his character that he should wish to wait until he had made a name before he went to her father and asked for her.

He had said that he would rather be a self-made man than a belted earl, and she agreed with him. Agreed with him! If he had declared that the moon was made of green cheese she would have assented.

Yes, she was happy, with the happiness which comes to a girl who has won the heart of the man to whom she has given her first—her best love.

She wondered how long it would be before she should see him again, how long before he would come and demand her hand of the earl.

She had said that if the earl refused it would make no difference to her; and under the great oaks she repeated her vow. Nothing should separate her from her hero, her lover.

When she reached the house she saw several carriages standing outside, and heard voices in the drawing-room. It seemed full of people to her confused sense, and she stood for one moment looking round her; but the next, Lady Ferndale came forward and embraced her.

"My dear child! I couldn't stay away from you another hour, dear," she said, "and so I have brought my friends with me," and she introduced two ladies, who, by the way they greeted Norah, had evidently heard her praises sung by Lady Ferndale.

There were also two other ladies who had come to make their introductory call upon Norah; and the earl, standing with his "reception" smile upon his face, watched Norah beneath his brows closely.

But though her thoughts had been scattering by the unexpected visitors, she regained her composure after a minute or two, and presided at the tea-table with the quiet self-possession which Lord Ferndale declared was one of her greatest charms.

"I was in despair when they told me you were out, dear," said Lady Ferndale, who had seated herself on a low chair beside Norah's table, and kept looking at the beautiful face, and glancing with covert triumph at her friends, as much as to say, "Did I exaggerate? Isn't she altogether charming?" "Where have you been, dear?" she asked.

"For a walk," she replied.

"In such a heat!" said Lady Ferndale. "Ah, well, I did it when I was your age," and she sighed.

"Are you so very old?" she said.

"Not too old to enjoy myself, dear; and I've come to ask you to help me. We are going to have—what shall I call it, Mary?" she broke off, addressing one of her friends, Lady Mary Marley; "not a harvest home. No, but a kind of tenants' fete."

"In this heat?" said Norah, with a smile.

Lady Ferndale laughed.

"Well, it's my husband's idea. He is never happy unless he has the people eating or dancing, or both round him. We are going to make it quite a—a—may I say jollification, Lord Arrowdale?" and she nodded at the earl mischievously.

"All words assume a grace on Lady Ferndale's lips," he retorted, with a bow.

"Well, a jollification. Awful word isn't it, dear? A great big marquee is going to be put on the lawn, and we—all of us—are to dance in it. I tell my husband that it will be sure to tumble down upon the top of us, but he says that it will make all the more fun. You'll come, won't you, Lord Arrowdale?"

"Most certainly," he responded; especially if there be any prospect of rescuing Lady Ferndale."

"I never can get any advantage over him," said Lady Ferndale, under her breath, to Norah. "He is always equal to the occasion. Very well, then," she went on, aloud; "then that's settled. I do hope you'll enjoy yourself, dear."

"I am sure I shall," said Norah.

"Perhaps it would be as well to know the date of the—the jollification," remarked the earl, softly.

"Wednesday week," said Lady Ferndale, promptly; then she bent forward and whispered: "Norah, I have asked your Mr. Cyril Burne."

Norah had resolved that she would not blush at the sound of Cyril's name; but the color came into her face notwithstanding.

"You have asked him?" she cried, trying to speak indifferently, and succeeding better than she hoped.

"Yes, I called at Mrs. Brown's as I came along. I thought somehow that you would like me to call on him before I reached you, dear."

Norah made a slight gesture of assent.

"He behaved so admirably. I heard it all from Jamieson, the coachman. It was beautifully done! And he was so thoughtful and considerate in sending me that note. I have been telling your father all about it, but, of course, he sees nothing to admire in it. What do you think he said?"

"I don't know."

"That it was what any one of the ploughmen would have done."

"And—and—did you see him?" she asked rather guiltily.

"Mr. Burne? No. He was out painting, they said; but I left him an invitation, and Ferndale is going to call on him. He says that he is a very lucky young man, and that if he had only insisted upon seeing you home, it would have been he who would have rescued you."

"But Lord Ferndale would have been inside the carriage," said Norah smiling. "Still, please tell him that I thank him all the same."

"I shall tell him nothing of the kind. I altogether decline to carry soft messages from you to him. He is quite infatuated enough, as it is."

Norah laughed, and the brightness in her face caught Lady Ferndale's attention.

"You seem very happy, to-day, my dear," she said; "has anything happened.

Norah felt the crimson burning her face and neck, and her eyes fell.

"Why, you have come to see me," she said.

Lady Ferndale bent forward and kissed her, making her feel a mass of dissimulation.

"My dear, you are simply irresistible. You got that trick of repartee from him," and she nodded toward the earl, who was talking to the others, who were listening in rapt attention as if to an oracle; "but the pretty speeches sound genuine from your lips. And was Mr. Burne very much hurt, dear?"

Norah arranged the teacups before her, and kept her eyes down.

"Yes, I am afraid so," she replied. "He is obliged to wear his left arm in a sling."

"Then you've seen him," said Lady Ferndale. "Of course, he called to ask after you this morning?"

Norah was silent, her heart beating and Lady Ferndale got up.

"Come and see us as soon as you can, my child," she said, as she kissed her, "and mind, Wednesday week!"

But even then it seemed as if she could not tear herself away, and half an hour passed before the carriage drove off.

The earl stood with Norah on the step, waving his hand to the departing guests, and Norah thought that he looked, if not pleased, at any rate a little less cold than usual. As a matter of fact, the self-possession and tact she had shown in the face of so many unexpected visitors had pleased him and flattered his vanity.

"Lady Ferndale may have seemed a little too exuberant, but—er—her position gives her great latitude. By the way, Norah, this Mr. Cyril Burne——"

Norah stood still and turned pale, but the earl was engaged in admiring his hands, and did not notice her face.

"Lady Ferndale tells me that she is, so to speak, taking him up. She seems to think that he behaved very well in last night's stupid accident."

"Yes, he did, papa," she said, in a low voice.

He looked at her with raised eyebrows, as if he did not need any confirmation of Lady Ferndale's opinion.

"Yes; she seems to be inclined to pay him some attention. I understand that she has asked him to this—this gathering. Under the circumstances, perhaps you had better treat him as a chance acquaintance, and—er—not completely cut him, as I desired you to do."

Norah's heart beat fast, but she wisely kept silent and merely bowed her head. Treat Cyril as a chance acquaintance!

She repeated the words to herself as she ran up stairs, and his name was on her lips as she opened the door of her boudoir.

Then she stopped short, for Becca South was sitting at the table at needlework.

She looked up demurely as Norah entered, then bent over her needle again.

"Why, Becca, you poor girl, have you been working all this time?"

"Yes, my lady," said Becca.

"And this lovely afternoon, too!" exclaimed Norah, pityingly. "Pray run out and get a little fresh air."

Then when Becca, with a gesture as if she were thankful to change her position, got up and left the room, Norah threw herself into her chair beside the window, and gave herself up to the joy, the unspeakable delight of thinking of him.

Cyril walked dome upon air. He stopped several times, just as Norah had done, but to ask himself what he had ever done to deserve such happiness.

Norah his! It seemed too good to be true, and to assure himself that he was not dreaming, he took out the faded rose and kissed it. Norah his! The thought was so huge, so overwhelming, that he could scarcely realize it, and he entered the little-sitting-room in a kind of blissful dream.

Two letters were lying on the table. One was a prettily-worded little note of invitation from Lady Ferndale, and his first thought as he read it was:

"Will Norah be there?"

Concluding that, at any rate, there was a chance of her being present, he sat down and wrote an acceptance. Then he opened the other letter.

It was from the "true, tried" friend Jack Wesley.

"Dear Cyril," it ran—"if you have any sanity remaining, come up at once. Business.—Jack."

At another time—say yesterday, for instance—Cyril would have decided that he had no sanity left, and would have refused to leave the neighborhood of his goddess; but now things had changed. Norah was his, and he only waited for the big success he spoke of to her to go to the earl and ask for her. Business had suddenly become of novel importance to Master Cyril.

He decided that he would go up at once—that is, to-morrow morning. Then he asked himself how he should let Norah know. He could not write lest the letter should fall into the earl's hands, and he was not likely to repeat the mistake of sending a message by any third person, as he had done before.

"If I go up by the first train," he mused, "I shall be able to be back by night. Who knows, I may stand a chance of catching a glimpse of my darling! I will neither send a message nor write to her."

As is usual with men—and artists especially—when they are happy, he sat up late that night smoking, and thinking and dreaming of Norah, but in the morning he started for the early train.

He had got within sight of the station, and was feeling for his watch when he found that he had left it behind him. In changing his everyday waistcoat for one more presentable and less paint-stained, he had taken out his watch and a ring, and placed them on the mantelshelf of the sitting-room that "he might not forget" them, with the usual result.

As he remembered that now and again chance wayfarers dropping in at the inn sometimes made their way, by mistake, into the little room, he felt annoyed with himself, and half stopped, wondering whether he should have time to run back.

At that moment a pink dress flitted out of one of the cottages opposite which he was standing, and Becca South tripped past, throwing him a smile.

It occurred to him that he would send a word of caution to Mrs. English about the watch, and he called to Becca.

"Did you call, sir?"

"Yes," he said hurriedly, for he fancied he heard the train. "Look here, Becca, I've left my watch on the mantelshelf at the inn. Are you going that way?"

"Yes, I'm going up to the Court, past the inn."

"Well, then," he said, "will you be so kind as to go in and ask Mrs. English to take the watch upstairs to my bedroom? Some one may come in—you understand?"

"Yes, I know," she assented, with a nod. "I'll do it."

"Thank you, Becca," he said. "I seem doomed to give you trouble." And he laid his hand on her shoulder and smiled at her gratefully. "By Jove, there's the train," he exclaimed in the same breath, and started off at a run.

Becca went down the road and entered the bar of the inn—if anything so unlike an ordinary bar can so be called—but it was empty, and she was about to call Mrs. English when she closed her lips suddenly, and on tiptoe approached the small passage that led to the sitting-room.

Neither Mrs. English nor the servant was in sight, and Becca's eyes flashed through the open door all over the room. Its artistic litter was something novel to her, and excited her curiosity, and, after a moment or two of listening, she stole inside.

She flitted to and fro, more like a jackdaw than ever, casting swift glances at the sketches and canvasses and turning over the books and knick-knacks which were strewn about the room; then she went to the mantelpiece.

The watch was there and she took it up and looked at it. As she did so the chain dragged down the ring, which, after the manner of rings, rolled across the room.

Away went Becca in pursuit, and, after a short search, she found it under the sofa.

It was a plain band of gold, with the initials C. B. on it, which Cyril had in a moment of preoccupation scratched upon it with his penknife.

Becca turned it over and looked at it, then she tried it on one finger after another until she found that it fitted the little one, and then held up her hand and gazed at it admiringly, thinking how nicely it showed off her slim hand.

Eve like, she passed from the admiring to the covetous mood.

He had said nothing about a ring; perhaps he had forgotten all about it. and if—if she should keep it, he would conclude that he had lost it. It was a beautiful ring, but, no doubt, a gentleman like Mr. Burne did not set much value on it.

While she was looking and longing and hesitating, Fate lent the evil one its aid, just as it had done in the matter of Catherine's photograph. Becca heard Mrs. English's voice in the kitchen. She started up and tried to pull the ring off her finger, but it stuck fast. In a spasm of terror, lest she should be discovered in the room, she darted through the passage into the bar, waited a moment, then, still tugging at the ring under her apron, passed into the road. Before she had gone twenty yards, the ring came off, and with a feeling of relief, she turned, intending to replace it. But as she neared the bar door, she stopped and hesitated. After all, the worst was over. She had taken the ring, and she might just as well keep it.

She slipped it into her pocket and began to sing, and, still singing, stopped a few paces from the inn door. Then she called out "Mrs. English!" and after a moment or two the landlady came into the bar. Becca walked toward the door as if she had only that second arrived,

"Oh, Mrs. English," she said, "Mr. Burne asked me to come and tell you to take his watch upstairs. I forgot whether he said he'd left it on the mantelshelf or on the table, but he said in the sitting-room."

"Dear me, yes," said Mrs. English. "That's just like him; he's so careless and forgetful. Some of these days he'll loose something, and honest folk will get the blame. But there, he's an artist gentleman, and what can you expect?" she added, raising her voice as she went into the sitting-room.

"Is it there all right?" cried Becca, in her clear treble.

"Yes, all right, and thank you, Becca South!" called back Mrs. English and Becca went on her way singing like the innocent, light-hearted girl she was.

(To be Continued.)

Pleasant Dreams

Come to those who drink only **PURE** tea like

Blue Ribbon

Avoid ordinary teas if you care for SOUND, SWEET SLEEP, and ask for the SPECIALLY MANUFACTURED, CAREFULLY PACKED **Blue Ribbon Tea. Red Label.**

ONLY ONE BEST—BLUE RIBBON'S IT.

MARKS OF THE LAUNDRY.

The number of letters used by laundries to distinguish their patrons' garments are disfiguring enough, but we are not so badly treated as elsewhere. In France the name and address of the laundry are stamped on each piece sent home, and should several laundries be patronized, one after the other, a fine collection will soon be found in addition to the geometrical marks indicative of the owner of the garment. In Russia laundry marks are under police supervision, and in this manner a refugee who makes his way to another town upon a forged passport is liable to detection, unless he can borrow linen with the mark of one of the town laundries upon it. Bulgarian laundries employ rubber stamps with ornamental designs, while in Germany the linen comes home with a small cloth label attached with heat and waterproof cement.

ONE ROOM'S RENT.

London Holds the Record for Costly Sites.

For the widening of Piccadilly the London County Council has been for some time negotiating the purchase of a strip of land fronting Piccadilly and St. James street. The area, which is of course built upon, contains about 1,200 square feet, and the price agreed upon to be paid is over $200,000. This works out to about $175 a square foot, or the enormous sum of nearly $7,500,000 per acre. It probably constitutes a record as the highest-priced spot on earth, but as the sum includes compensation for disturbance and damages, the purchase cannot be compared with the prices recently paid for sites in the city.

Cornhill is the highest rented spot on earth. A single room was let not long ago for between $10,000 and $15,000 a year. In the west end a small shop with basements fetches over $5,000 a year in Bond street, and the remainder of the house lets at proportionate sums. The rateable value of London is about $200,000,000, of which sum $90,000,000 is represented by the value in sites.

ONE-TOED WOMEN.

Everybody has heard of the small feet of the ladies of China. But it is not so generally known that they commonly have but one toe. This is, however, the fact. The great toe of the females of the first rank, and of some of the inferior classes also, is the only one left to act with any freedom; the rest are doubled down under the foot in their tenderest infancy, and retained by compresses and tight bandages till they unite with and are buried in the sole.

INGENIOUS DEVICE.

The Icelanders have a strange but effective plan for preventing horses straying away from any particular spot. If two gentlemen happen to be riding without attendants, and wish to leave their horses for any reason, they tie the head of one horse to the tail of another, and the head of this to the tail of the former. In this state it is utterly impossible for the horses to move on, either backwards or forwards. If disposed to move at all, it will be only in a circle, and even then there must be mutual agreement to turn their heads the same way.

STEADY COMPANY.

He—There's no doubt about it, "a man is known by the company he keeps."

She—Not always. If the average man were really known by his company she'd shake him right away.

EXIT.

Mary Ann—I've come to tell you, mum, that th' gasoline stove has gone out.

Mistress—Well, light it again.

"I can't. Sure, it went out through the roof."

"No," declared Mr. Nagget, "there never was a woman on earth who could refrain from turning around to rubber at some other woman's clothes." "No?" replied his wife, sweetly. "Didn't you ever hear of Eve?"

THE SHOE THAT PINCHED.

Uncle Sam—"Wow! Great jumping-jacks! Get it off, John. That shoe pinches!"