THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XIX.

Cyril—for we will call him so still—had escaped from London in time to be present at the ball by one of those lucky chances which favor ardent lovers.

On the morning of the 14th he had called at Lord Newall's in a state of desperation which almost prompted him, in case he should find that that erratic nobleman had not returned, to leave a polite message to the effect that Lord Newall must find some one else to paint his picture. He had haunted Moses' shop and Harley street every day, and had worked himself into a frame of mind which rendered him a nusiance to himself and to Jack, as that candid friend did not fail to inform him.

But it is the unexpected which always happens and to Cyril's inquiry, "Is Lord Newall at home?" the footman replied in the affirmative.

Lord Newall, little suspecting that the young artist was Viscount Santleigh, an heir to a peerage compared with which Lord Newall's was a mere musgroom, treated Cyril with that mixture of cordiality and condescension which is so exasperating, and expressed his desire that Cyril should set off at once—that is, the next day, the 15th—for Brittany.

"I am going there to-morrow, and shall be glad if you will accompany me," he said.

Cyril felt tempted to decline the offer and the invitation, but it occurred to him as he hesitated—much to Lord Newall's astonishment—that he could run down to Santleigh and see Norah before he started; and, full of his resolve to make himself famous before he presented himself to the Earl of Arrowdale, he signified his acceptance of the proposal.

"You won't start until the night mail, I suppose?" he said, not quite so respectfully as Lord Newall was accustomed to be addressed by his "inferiors." "Because I don't think I could manage it if you started any earlier."

"I will go by the night mail, Mr. Burne," said his lordship.

"All right, then, I'll be at the station—my lord."

He jumped into a hansom, and, dashing into Jack's room, informed him, all in a breath, of the arrangement he had made with Lord Newall, and that he intended running down to Santleigh at once.

"Can't you write?" asked Jack, and Cyril had colored.

"Write? No, you know I can't. Besides, I—I may be kept over in that beastly place for months. What, go without seeing her? I'd rather let the picture slide."

"Brittany is anything but a beastly place," remarked Jack, with a smile. "But go down and bid your lady-love adieu, by all means. You'll look in here as you come back?"

Cyril caught a train, and arrived at The Chequers at sunset, and considerably flurried Mrs. English by telling her that he was going to leave The Chequers the next morning and demanding a clean shirt, hot water, and his dress clothes.

While he was dressing—which he did in a kind of mental abstraction, thinking all the time of how Norah would look when he entered the ballroom—he missed his ring, and, on coming down, asked Mrs. English if she had seen it.

"A ring, sir?" she said, getting flurried instantly. "Oh, dear me, sir! You don't mean to say that you've lost——"

"Oh, no, never mind," broke in Cyril, promptly. "I dare say I've left it somewhere about the rooms. I've dropped it somewhere else; I'm always losing something. Don't be alarmed, Mrs. English, but if you find my head lying about some day, please put it on the mantelshelf. Don't worry about the ring," and he hurried out to his fly, which he had ordered as he came through the village and was driven away, leaving Mrs. English in a nice state of confusion, and muttering:

"Bless me, what a wild young gentleman he be! But there, he's a hartis' and he can't help it."

Cyril was driven to the park, and entered the anteroom of the ballroom to leave his dustcoat, and while he was being relieved of it by the footman, peered through the opening into the big marquee.

It was brilliantly lighted, and looked indeed like a fairy scene, with its flowers and flags and its myriad of vari-colored lamps. But he could not see the one person for a sight of whom his heart ached. Then he entered, and, looking round with scarcely concealed eagerness, saw her—saw her dancing with Guildford Berton! She was smiling at something he was saying, and her loveliness, heightened by her simple ball dress, bewildered and overwhelmed him. To the lover the beauty of his mistress is always changing, intensifying, always a sacred mystery and subject for wonderment.

Hitherto he has only seen her in ordinary walking attire; tonight she was arrayed for conquest; a queen in splendor, though her dress was only a simple one—her arms gleaming like ivory, her red-brown hair like burnished gold, her beautiful eyes glowing with the reflected many-colored lights.

He gazed at her open-eyed, drinking in her loveliness, falling down before it, mentally, and worshiping it. Could it be possible that this lovely creature had condescended to love him, to tell him so, to promise to be his wife?

Then all in a moment a chill struck him. She was dancing with another man, his arm round her waist, her head was resting on his shoulder. And that man was—Guildford Berton!

Love is unreasonable, illogical. It never occurred to him that, being there, Norah could scarcely refuse to dance because her lover—who had left her for nearly a fortnight without a word of explanation—was absent! He did not think of that, but stood still, and suddenly grew cold—not hot—with unconscious jealousy.

"Mr. Burne, and at last! How unkind of you to keep away from us all day!"

"It is my fate that is unkind, Lady Ferndale. I assure you——"

"Never mind. I shall keep my scolding until after supper, and so give you time to invent some pretty excuses. But now you have come, you must dance. Let me see."

She looked round, and saw Becca standing looking on with glittering eyes, her small foot softly tapping the ground impatiently, and her ladyship, thinking "At any rate, I have found a handsome partner for him" went toward her.

"There is a young lady—that pretty one with the black hair. Will you dance with her?"

"I will dance with any one you are good enough to choose for me," said Cyril, and he went up to Becca, casting a longing, wistful thought, if not a wistful glance, toward Norah.

Becca blushed becomingly, and, her dark face grew radiant. She had thrown over her last partner, whose clumsy movements had threatened the destruction of her frock, and had been dying to dance. And now Mr. Burne, a real gentleman—though an artist—had chosen her.

Becca could dance—Santleigh and Ferndale girls took to it naturally, just as the children of the Pacific Islands take to swimming—and to her delight, Mr. Burne was simply a perfect waltzer. Blushing with pleasure and pride, she went two or three times round the room with him, then the smile on her parted lips and in her glittering eyes died away, and she stopped

"What is the matter? Anything wrong? Haven't I got your step, Becca?"

"Oh, you dance beautifully, beautifully, Mr. Burne," said Becca. "But—but I want to pick up my dress."

But it was not to arrange her train that she had stopped. When she had started for the ball that evening Becca was perfectly satisfied with her dress, but deplored the fact of one thing being lacking—she had no jewelry. All the ladies would, she thought, be smothered in diamonds, and most of the village girls would have brooches or bracelets or earrings, and she had nothing, not even a——

Then, suddenly there flashed upon her the remembrance of the ring she had "found" beside Cyril's watch.

Now, a man, if he had stolen it, would never have dreamed of wearing it in public. Only a woman—and only a woman of Becca's type—would have had the courage and audacity of even entertaining the thought.

She looked at it, put it on, held up her hand before the glass, and—went to the ball in it!

She had it on when Cyril entered, and had meant to take it off, but when he approached her and asked her to dance she forgot the ring in her flurry and fluster of pride and gratification, and only remembered it after the third turn.

She stooped down, found the arrangement of the train so difficult that it required both hands, and managed to take off the ring and slip it into her pocket.

"I'm all right now, sir," she said, looking up at him.

Poor Cyril danced like a machine, in perfect time and harmony, but neither his heart nor his brain was in it, and all his soul was intent upon his beautiful sweetheart.

He watched her, sometimes directly, sometimes over his shoulder, and he saw her walk off on Guildford Berton's arm. They disappeared for a time, and then when he saw them next the dark-faced, self-possessed Berton was still her companion.

Cyril wondered whether they had been dancing together before, whether they had "spent the evening" in each other's company, and his heart ached and burned as he tried to talk to Becca, who was really dancing beautifully, and deserved on that account a little attention.

"Great many people here? Yes, Becca. I hope you are enjoying yourself. Where have I been? Well, that's a long story. So you have missed me, have you? I wonder," almost to herself, "whether any one else has?"

"Lor', yes, sir. Mrs. English says The Chequers isn't the same without you."

"Oh, Mrs. English," remarked Cyril disconsolately. "Has—has Lady Norah been well, Becca?"

"Lor', yes, and so gay! I never see a young lady so happy and light-hearted. She's singing and laughing all day. And she's been out so much lately. All the grand folk make so much of her, they do."

Cyril stifled a groan. Singing and laughing all day! And he had spent a fortnight of mental torture. And now he came back to find her dancing with Guildford Berton, who seemed to be her shadow!

He looked at that gentleman as he bent over the chair in which Norah was seated, and for the first time Cyril realized how handsome a man Guildford Berton was. Perhaps he had been paying her attentions all the time he, Cyril, had been away? He had probably seen her every day at the Court, had walked and ridden with her, had spent hours in her society whispering to her, as he was whispering now. And she had been light-hearted and gay! Had she forgotten him? he asked himself. She had not looked his way yet. Surely she must know that he was in the room, and could have given him one look of recognition of welcome.

There can be no love where there is no jealousy, or vice versa and Cyril was scarcely himself that night, unfortunately. At another time he would have thrust aside the thoughts that were torturing him, but he had had a fortnight of suspense and impatience; he had rushed down from London without his dinner, and was tired and overstrained, and the merry demons who delight in tormenting mankind had got firm hold of him, and were enjoying themselves amazingly.

And still he danced without a mistake, steering Becca through the crowd as he would have steered a duchess, and thinking as little of her as if she were a lay figure.

They attracted some attention. Becca was slim and pretty, and the delicious exercise, combined with her pride in being the partner of the handsomest man in the room, had set her eyes dancing and given a warm flush to her dark face; and the spectators were looking on admiringly and curiously.

"Who is that gentleman dancing with that pretty girl with the black hair?" asked a dowager sitting just behind Norah.

"Oh, he," replied the gentleman she addressed, who had got Cyril's name from Lady Ferndale, but knew no more, and yet was anxious to appear well informed and gratify the dowager's curiosity, "oh, that is Mr. Cyril Burne, a rising artist; quite a clever young fellow. And he is dancing with the girl he is engaged to. Quite a love affair of the old romantic kind, I assure your ladyship."

"In-deed," responded the dowager. "Well, they are well matched, I'm sure. What nice hair she has! And he is—yes, really he is, very handsome."

Norah heard this, and face flushed for a second, and heart ached. How could he whirl round with that vain and giddy girl while she sat there waiting for him? Had she not waited for a whole fortnight? Why did he not come to her and, making any excuse he liked, take her away from that hateful man who persisted in following her like a shadow, and murmuring in her ear?

Oh, that game of cross-purposes! The music ceased at last, and Cyril driven desperate, took Becca to a seat, and, it is to be feared, left her rather cavalierly.

"You must give me another dance, Becca," he said, not meaning it in the slightest, scarcely, indeed, knowing what he said; and, resolved to go straight to Norah, he began to thread his way through the now confused and entagling throng.

But he has not got half-a-dozen yards before Lady Ferndale met him. She was on the arm of a gentleman who bought pictures and flattered himself that he was a critic; and good natured Lady Ferndale, who was always on the lookout to do some one a good turn, had bethought her of introducing the patron of art to Mr. Cyril Burne.

"Oh, Mr. Burne," she said, "let me introduce you to Mr. Romley. You and he will be able to talk pictures" and with a kindly smile, away she went, and left poor Cyril in the art patron and critic's clutches.

Mr. Romley proceeded to talk pictures at once, and poor Cyril, though he tried his hardest to get away, and cast wistful, despairing glances toward Norah—still seated next Mr. Guildford Berton—found himself, like the wedding guest, firmly buttonholed by this ancient mariner, who was delighted at getting some one upon whom he could pour out his artistic twaddle.

Cyril listened—or, rather, did not listen—answering in abstracted monosyllables to the stream of insanity and pompous ignorance, and edging further and further away from his tormentor; and he had just succeeded in escaping when the band struck up again, and he had the mortification of seeing Norah going off on the arm of a tall guardsman.

If he could have seen the look Norah cast in his direction, he would have been somewhat comforted and encouraged; if he could have guessed with what impatient pain she was asking herself why he avoided her, why he preferred to dance with Becca and talk to any old fogey, rather than come to her, he would have broken away from the bore who buttonholed him, and flown to her side; but he did not guess what was passing in her mind, and it seemed to him that she was avoiding him, as it appeared to her that he was keeping away from her.

To those two longing, wretched hearts the music made horrible discord, the room seemed stifling, the light bewildering.

Cyril would not dance again, but wandered round the edge of the waltzers, looking at Norah as the guardsman deftly steered her through the maze, and at last he found himself outside the marquee. Two or three men were walking up and down smoking cigarettes in the darkness, which, in comparison with the brilliance within, seemed Cimmerian and Cyril, in no mood for company, kept away from them and lit a cigarette himself. Presently they halted near him, but not seeing him, and he heard one of them say:

"Yes, it looks like it. Confound the fellow! It seems as if none of us had any chance against him."

"No, not to be wondered at when you come to think of it. He's better looking than any of us—yourself included, Charlie. Women admire that kind of man; dark, mysterious, romantic."

"More like a confounded foreigner than an Englishman," grumbled the young fellow who had spoken, the son of a neighboring peer, and one of Norah's most devoted slaves.

"Got the best of the running, you see, Charlie; sees her every day; and then he's one of the clever chaps, don't you know. Can talk and all that sort of thing. Yes, he's got all the odds in his favor, and I'm afraid he'll carry off the prize. At any rate, he's making all the running to-night."

"Yes, sticks to her like her shadow," grumbled Lord Charles. "I heard her promise him another dance after supper, and I'll be bound he takes her in."

Cyril listened half-absently. It never occurred to him that they were talking of Norah and Guildford Berton, until suddenly he heard her name.

"Yes, Charlie, my boy," said his friend, "you may look upon yourself as a gone coon. The divine Norah has slipped through your fingers. Accept my sympathy and another cigarette. Mr. Guildford Berton will be the happy man!"

Cyril started, and his face crimsoned, and then went white. These men had put into words the doubts and the dread that were haunting him and driving him half-mad.

He flung his cigarette away, and was turning to go into the ballroom again, scarcely knowing why, when he heard a stifled sob near him in the darkness, and, peering into it, caught the glimmer of a woman's dress a few yards from him.

He went up to it, his own misery moving him to compassion, and put out his hand.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked in a low voice. "Who is it?"

The sob was repeated, and a voice said:

"No, go away!"

"Why, Becca, is that you?" he said gently. "What is the matter?" and he took her by the arm, and tried to turn her face toward a streak of light that came from the marquee.

Becca struggled feebly, then gave in and stood with drooping head, but evidently battling with her emotion. She, too, had heard the conversation which had so stirred Cyril, and like a flash of flightning it had opened her eyes and confirmed her suspicions. She knew now for certain the reason why Guildford Berton had avoided her of late. It was not her he cared for, but Lady Norah!

With her hand pressed to her heaving bosom and her lips set tight, she struggled to keep down the bitter tears.

"Come, Becca," said Cyril, compassionately enough, but with a trace of impatience in his voice, for he was dying to return to the ballroom to find Norah, and "have it out." "Tell me what's the matter."

"No, no!" she panted, "I—I can't It's nothing!"

"Young ladies don't cry about nothing, not generally," said Cyril. "Come, what is it? Can I do anything for you?"

"No, no," she said, his sympathy starting her into tears again. "You can't do anything, no one can! I'm so un—un—unhappy," she added, with a smothered sob.

"My poor child, so are most of us! But perhaps I can help you to get rid of your unhappiness. Tell me what it is."

"I—I can't! It's no use asking me, sir," she said, whimpering. "I—I want to go home, to get away from this place."

"But why?" asked Cyril. "Why, Becca, you seemed the jolliest of the jolly a little while ago."

"So I was, but I didn't know then. Oh, it's cruel, cruel!"

"Well, if you won't tell me, or you don't care to, I won't pester you," said Cyril. "There, dry your eyes, and go and dance, and try to forget your trouble. It won't grow any lighter for crying over it," he added philosophically. "Here, wait until I go and get you a glass of champagne," he said. "But leave off crying, or everybody will see what you have been up to, and be wandering what such a pretty girl has got ta cry for. There, sit down there," and he half pushed her gently into one of the chairs that had been piled up near where they stood.

Cyril made his way in the throng again, and went straight to the refreshment room. He purposely refrained from looking round the marquee lest he should see Norah, and forgetting Becca, be forced to go up to her.

(To be Continued.)

WORK.

"Why don't you go to work?"

"Mister," said Plodding Pete, "I've talked for five minutes tryin' to tell you a hard-luck story that would win a dime."

"You have."

"An' if I kin hold yer interest, I'm liable to keep on talkin', an' den maybe not git a cent."

"That's quite true."

"Well, mister, ain't dat work?"

THERE'S THE RUB.

Jenks—"What's the matter, old man?"

Jonks—"Why, the fault is my daughter can't sing.

Jenks—"Lucky beggar! I wish mine couldn't."

Jonks—"Ah! but she thinks she can."

THE COMPARISON.

Towne—Yes, my wife is able to dress on comparatively little money.

Browne—Oh, come now! Comparatively little?

Towne—I mean on little compared with what she thinks she ought to have.

"Your honor," said the attorney, "this man's insanity takes the form of a belief tnat everyone wants to rob him. He won't allow even me, his counsel, to approach him." "Maybe he's not so crazy after all," murmured the Court, in a judicial whisper.

Scroggs—"Henpeck told me that he regarded the toothache as one of the greatest of temporal blessings." Baggs—"What an incomprehensible idea!" Scroggs—"Yes; he said it made him forget his other troubles."

Wife—"Was that man ever a farmer?" Husband—"No." Wife—"But he's always talking about the delights of living in the country." Husband—"Exactly. That's what shows he never was a farmer."

"You're as bad as a playful kitten in jumping at conclusions," remarked a youth to his friend. "Do kittens jump at conclusions?" asked the guilty one. "Certainly; have you never seen kittens chase their tails?"

"What were those two women quarrelling about out on the verandah?" "Why, they were coming in together, and when they got to the door they both said, 'Age before beauty,' at the same time."

PEACE MAY NOT BE WHOLLY A BLESSING FROM THE CZAR'S POINT OF VIEW.