THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR

THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XXIV.

Norah drew Harman's arm within her own and led her back to the phaeton, and Guildford Berton followed, fairly dazed by this latest stroke of luck. Who the girl was that had gone with Cyril he could not even conjecture. As he himself would never have condescended to procure a ticket for a stranger, it did not occur to him that Cyril might have done so. Anyway, this new link in the chain suited his purpose to a marvelous degree, and by the time the ponies had started he had collected himself and mastered the situation.

"This is very—sad!" he murmured to Norah.

Norah inclined her head. She could not speak.

"The question is, what is to be done next?" he mused.

"I must go! I must find her?" sobbed poor Harman.

"We must think it over, Mrs. Harman," he said, gently. "I am afraid there can be no doubt that your niece has gone off with Cyril Burne—but—but I am not sure that we ought to take the worst view of the case."

Harman looked at him.

"You see," he said, addressing her, but watching Norah's face, "Cyril Burne is a gentleman; of that I am—we all are—quite certain, and, being a gentleman, it follows that he cannot act dishonorably, I am convinced of that——"

"Why did he entice her away?" faltered Harman, not unreasonably.

"There may have been reasons of which we know nothing," he answered. "We know nothing of Cyril Burne or his affairs, and cannot surmise his object in running off with with her. He may have very good reasons for a secret marriage. For instance he may be afraid of offending some relative from whom he has expectations."

"Marrying her!" echoed Harman.

"Yes," he said, with quiet confidence. "My belief is that Mr. Burne intends making your niece his wife."

Harman drew a long breath and looked agitatedly at Norah; but Norah avoided her eyes, and stared straight before her, vacantly as before.

"I have no doubt we shall find that they were married this morning."

A shudder ran through Norah's frame, and the hand that held the reins shook.

"Yes," he resumed, musingly, "the more I consider it, the stronger I am convinced that my theory is the right one. Why did Mr. Burne go off to London so suddenly, and why did he come back so secretly, so to speak? He must have gone up to make arrangements for their flight and marriage, and no doubt he came down, using the fete as a blind, to carry her off. Depend upon it, they are married by this time."

"Oh, if I could only think so, sir!" murmured Harman.

"I am sure of it," he said. "I can scarcely explain why I feel so convinced that I am right, but I am convinced. However, we can soon find out the truth."

Harman looked at him anxiously and expectantly.

"If you will allow me to help you, Mrs. Harman, I will undertake to trace them and discover what has really happened."

Harman could only look at him with unspeakable gratitude.

"Yes," he said, reflectingly, "I know a person in London—a detective—who will have no difficulty in working out the whole matter, and I will telegraph to him at once."

"I—I don't know how to thank you, sir," faltered Harman.

"Don't you think that will be the best plan, Lady Norah?" he asked, speaking to her for the first time.

Norah forced herself to reply, "You are very good."

"Not at all," he said, with self-depreciation. "We must help each other when and how we can, and I am only too glad to be of some slight service. Don't be anxious, Mrs Harman, all will come right."

"The scandal, sir! we have always been so respectable."

"As to that," he said, thoughtfully, "I think we might prevent any gossip if we took proper steps."

Harman waited breathlessly, "Oh, sir, if we could!"

"It is easy enough," he said quietly. "We have only got to say that we have heard satisfactory news at the station or elsewhere—" He saw Norah's face suddenly flush, and he went on more cautiously; "You need say nothing, Mrs. Harman; in fact, the less you say the better. Leave it to me. I am afraid I must tell a white lie or two, but it is pardonable to suppress the truth sometimes. I shall say that Becca has gone to a situation in London, which she had procured without the knowledge of her friends. She was such a restless girl that the story will be readily believed."

"Yes, sir, she was always restless poor girl!"

"I will go on with you to the village," he said, "and put this explanation into circulation, and then return to the station. I know the station master very well, and I am sure I can show him good reasons for keeping the booking clerk silent, and he himself will understand that the affair is not to be talked about."

Harman faltered out her gratitude, and they drove on in silence.

"Will you put me down at the inn, Lady Norah?" he said.

Norah pulled up the ponies at The Chequers, and he got out.

"You are letting this matter trouble you, I am afraid?" he said.

"I—I liked Becca—once," she said, in a repressed tone.

"Yes, I understand," he murmured. "But do not let it worry you too much. I shall find her in a very short time, and I am sure it will turn out as I have said. She is Mrs. Cyril Burne by this time," and he smiled.

Norah drove off without another look at him or a word of good-by, and he went into The Chequers.

Mrs. English was still surrounded by a knot of idlers drinking her beer and discussing the event of the day, and Guildford Berton advanced to the tiny bar.

"Ah, Mrs. English," he said, in a cheerful voice, that was loud enough to be heard by the persons inside and outside the inn, "I thought you would like to hear the result of our inquiries. It's a very tame ending to the sensation, but we have discovered that Becca South has gone off to a situation she has got in London."

"There now!"

"Yes," said Berton, laughing lightly. "It is a very prosaic finish, isn't it? But I'm glad it's no worse."

"Ah, you may well say so, sir," assented Mes. English, tragically, "we was talking of dragging the pond——"

"Oh, nonsence; Becca was the last person, I should think, to commit suicide."

"I shouldn't be surprised at anything Becca South did," said Mrs. English, pursing her lips, "and I'm glad it's no worse than it is. But there, it's just like her to go off like a flash o' lightning and without one word to anyone. Why couldn't she tell her aunt and her grandfather, like an ordinary girl?"

"Because Becca isn't an ordinary girl," he retorted, pleasantly. "But as you say, Mrs. English, we are all glad it isn't worse."...

"And what about my Mr. Cyril?" demanded Mrs. English, in a tone that implied that his disappearance was of far greater importance.

"Oh, he went up to London by the market train," he said, carelessly. "Important business, I expect. There is nothing wonderful in that."

"Why, he and Becca must have traveled by the same train!" said some one, shyly.

"Very likely. However, I am glad the matter is set at rest. Good-morning, Mrs. English; good morning all;" and, humming an air, he sauntered out, leaving them to discuss the termination of the sensation.

Outside on the bench the man Furlong was still lying, apparently asleep, and Berton scarcely noticed him.

He made his way back to the station, and got the station-master and the booking-clerk together, and, with the same air of easy carelessness, said:

"I dare say you were rather surprised by our visit and our questions but the fact is, we were a little uneasy at the sudden disappearance of Becca South. Mrs. Harman had got it into her head that the girl had—well, run away; and there was some absurd suspicion that Mr. Cyril Burne was connected with her flight; but I am glad to say that we have just had tidings from her. She had gone up to London to take a situation, and, fearing that her people would not let her go, she took French leave."

"I see, sir," said the station-master. "Lor', if there was a fuss made over everybody that went off suddenly without sayin' goodby, we should have enough to do in that line."

"Exactly, and I am sure we are very much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken. By the way, there has been a good deal of gossip about the girl, and should any one ask any questions, perhaps you won't mind telling them the truth."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," assented the station-master, and Berton went down the steps again, feeling that thus far his cleverness and his luck were serving him faithfully; but the strain had told upon him, and when he reached the cottage he stood by the door in the wall, conscious of a reluctance to enter.

For the first time the forbidding aspect of the place struck him; the dead silence, the grimness conveyed by the high walls, sent a chill through him; it was all so terribly silent; and yet, for all its silence, he seemed to hear faintly, very faintly, the voice of the dead girl who lay hidden under the heap of leaves.

"I'm getting nervous!" he muttered, with a forced smile. "That won't do. Once I lose my nerve——"

Pulling himself together, he put the key in the lock and opened the door. As he did so the man whom he had last seen asleep on the inn bench came sauntering by.

Berton eyed him curiously, and with the vague suspicion with which he was doomed to regard every stranger henceforth, and as long as life should last; and, with a nod, said:

"It is a fine day."

"I've seen better, and I've seen worse," said Furlong, sententiously, and with a glance at the high walls and as much of the grim cottage as he could see through the half-open door, sauntered on.

CHAPTER XXV.

Norah drove to the Court, and on the way managed to mumur a few words of encouragement to Harman, and at once sent her to her own room. Then, when she herself was alone, with the door safely locked upon the outside, world, she faced this that had happened to her.

It was so incredible, so impossible, that at first she felt simply stupefied and numbed; but presently, when she realized that Cyril had indeed deserted her, that she had lost him forever—for even if he had not married Becca, all must be over between them—she uttered a low cry, and flung herself face downward on the bed, and a flood of tears came to her relief.

So she lay and cried, her hands writhing together, her beautiful hair strewn on the white coverlid, until her woman's pride came to her aid, and, with a moan of shame, she rose, trembling, but resolute.

This man, who had won her heart was not worth a sigh, least of all a tear! He had been acting, she told herself with a shudder, from the very first. All the passionate protestations, which had thrilled her to the very soul he had learned by heart; perhaps he had rehearsed them with Becca South! He had been false to the core, and had just amused himself—that was all!—by making love to her.

The shame of the thought that she had been jilted, scorned by a man to whom she had given her whole heart, burned her like actual fire, and her proud head bowed itself on her breast with the weight of self-scorn and contempt.

And she had believed in him so wholly, had loved him so passionately and devotedly. Had loved? A shudder shook her as something within whispered: "Yes, and love him still!" And, with a moan, she flung herself on the bed again.

That he had left her, deserted her, for such an one as Becca South, added a refined torture to her anguish. If the girl he had preferred to her had been a lady, one in her own station, she thought she could have borne it better—but Becca, her own maid!

No doubt they were laughing together over his treachery and falseness! For the first time she realized that she was an earl's daughter, and something of the pride of race stirred within her, and increased her shame and humiliation.

And yet as she lay there in all the abandonment of her misery, a strange, vague doubt haunted her, a doubt whether it was possible that she could have been so cruelly deceived, whether Cyril could be so base and vile as facts seemed to make him. Why should he have made love to her, and won her promise to be his wife, if all the time he was in love with Becca South?

At last, with a weary gesture, that was at the same time full of determination, she rose and bathed her face.

Cyril Burne had passed from her life, never to re-enter it, and from that moment it behooved her, if she possessed a spark of womanly pride and self-respect, to cast him out from her heart and even from her mind. She would force herself to forget him, or, if she thought of him at all, to regard him as beneath her contempt.

With trembling hands she did up her hair, and put on her prettiest dress, and then went downstairs, determined so to play her part that no one should suspect that her heart was very nearly broken.

The drawing-room door was open, and she went in and sat down to the piano, and began to play mechanically. Instinctively she wandered into a mournful sonata of Schubert's in harmony with her feelings, and her eyes began to fill with tears. With an impatient gesture she dashed them away, and changed the sonata to a brilliant fugue, which filled the room with a magnificent storm of sound, in the midst of which the earl entered.

He paused at the door, looking at her, and listening, and his face softened, or, rather, grew more proud and satisfied. She was very beautiful, he thought, and she played like a musician. Yes, this daughter of his was a credit to him!

Norah did not know he was in the room until he came and stood by the piano; then she stopped playing, and, with a start, looked up at him, and he saw how pale and worn she looked.

"Please do not stop," he said, with a wave of his hand; and she went on playing, but more softly.

He did not guess how keenly her heart ached with the desire to tell him all, and to receive one word of sympathy and consolation from him.

She came to the end of the piece, and the earl nodded approval.

"You play with taste and expression, Norah," he said; then, as if half ashamed of having unbent even so slightly, he added, in the same breath, almost as if he were afraid she would make some affectionate response: "By the way, what is this story that I have heard about one of your maids—the girl named Rebecca South?"

Norah winced, but she raised her eyes to his steadily. This was a part of the ordeal she would have to undergo, and she would bear it without making a sign.

"The story, papa?"

"Yes, I have heard, from my valet, some rumor that the girl has run away. It is not true, I suppose?"

"Yes, it is true," she said.

"Run away from the Court! Why has she done so. With whom has she run away, pray?"

"She is Mrs. Harman's niece," said Norah, slowly, and still playing softly, "and Harman is trying to keep it secret. She ran away with—Mr. Cyril Burne."

"In-deed! It would be scarcely correct to say that it is no more than I expected, as my acquaintance with the—gentleman was so slight; but from what I have heard of him, I am not surprised. I trust that it will be a warning to you not to credit every stranger you may happen to meet with all the virtues."

"The truth is not known, papa, it is Harman's secret——"

"She need have no fear of my communicating it. The girl has left my roof of her own free will, and there is an end of it—and her!"

Norah drew a breath of relief, and he moved toward the door with his slow and stately step; but he came back and stood looking down at her.

"Are you unwell?" he asked.

"I am a little tired this morning, papa," she replied.

"You look pale. Would you like to see a doctor?"

Norah shook her head again, and a faint smile that was more sad than tears crossed her face. No doctor could give her back the Cyril she had loved and lost!

"You have not looked well for some time past," he said. "Perhaps you need a change of air."

"I don't know," said Norah, listlessly.

"I am going up to town in a few days. I had thought of staying at an hotel, but if you would like to accompany me, I will write and tell them to have the small house in Park Lane ready. There are not many people in town just now, but the change may benefit you. Do you care to go?"

"Thank you, papa," she replied. "Yes, I would like to go."

"Very well," he said. "I will make the necessary arrangements. You will take Harman with you, and the housekeeper can send some of the servants up at once," and he left the room.

The day passed slowly, draggingly. Norah tried to read, to work, but the book dropped in her lap, and she found herself dwelling upon her trouble, and going over all its details one by one with livid distinctness. She dressed herself for dinner, Harman being too ill to wait upon her, and went down with a listless step, to find Guildford Berton in the drawing-room.

His presence was a very unwelcome one to her, and her face flushed as he came up to her, and, under his breath, said:

"I have wired to my man in London; do not be anxious."

Before she could respond the earl entered.

"Ah, Guildford," he said, "I am glad you dine with us this evening. I was going to ask you to come over. We are going to town for a week or two. Lady Norah has not been looking well for some little time past, and needs change of air."

"Yes? I trust the change may do her good."

"There were one or two things I should be glad if you will see to, Guildford," and he mentioned several matters connected with the estate.

"Certainly, I quite understand. Don't let anything worry you while you are away; I will see to everything so far as I can."

"You know more about the estate than I do, I really think," remarked the earl, graciously. "I am sure I do not know what we should do without you. We go to the house in Park Lane."

"Yes? I will write and tell the people in charge."

"Oh, thank you,'- said the earl. "I had intended doing so, but if you will be so kind."

"Certainly," assented Berton, as if it were a matter of course. "Lady Norah will have the room overlooking the park? And as to horses and so on, I suppose you will hire? I will write to Selby's. Lady Norah will want a brougham for herself," he added thoughtfully.

"Order what you think necessary," said the earl.

Norah sat and listened in silence. She was beginning to understand how Guildford Berton had rendered himself indispensable to her father.

"By the way," said the earl, after a pause, "you would be all the better for a change yourself, Guildford."

"Oh, I am all right—quite well," he said.

"You scarcely look so," returned the earl. "You are thinner than you were, and paler."

Guildford Berton glanced out of the corner of his eyes at Norah, and forced a smile upon his face, which he knew looked haggard in the light thrown by the shaded lamp.

"Do I?" he said, carelessly.

"When I say a change, I don't wish to infer that Santleigh is unhealthy. I consider it one of the most salubrious places in England," remarked the earl, stiffly. "But change of scene is sometimes of advantage. We could find room for you at Park Lane if you care to come."

(To be Continued.(

$1000. Reward

Recent investigations have disclosed the fact that unscrupulous handlers of flour are endeavoring to take advantage of the great popularity of Ogilvie's "Royal Household" Flour by refilling, with cheap inferior flour, the bags and barrels bearing the Ogilvie Brand, and selling it as the genuine article.

In order to bring the guilty parties to justice we offer the following reward.

REWARD.

The Ogilvie Flour Mills Co., Ltd., will pay One Thousand Dollars ($1,000.00) for such evidence as will result in the conviction of any person, persons, firms or corporations who may be refilling their bags or barrels with flour of other manufacture and selling the same as flour manufactured by the Ogilvie Flour Mills Co., Ltd.

The Ogilvie Flour Mills Co., Ltd.

MONTREAL.

ANKLETS OF GOLD.

English Women Use Ancient Symbols of Slavery.

The anklet, after hundreds of years, has returned to favor in London, and is to grace the slender ankle of the belle of to-day.

The modern anklet resembles the plain gold band first worn as a sign of bondage. Being a slave no more, woman, as is her habit, is only too glad to play with the symbol of slavery, provided the symbol is becoming. Therefore, the anklet graces the foot of the girl who wants to be just a little more than merely up-to-date.

Oriental anklets are much in demand, and in many instances these are supplied with a hinge and clasp, and slip round the foot easily.

Some of the new anklets are the tiniest gold bands inscribed with ancient charms, said to defend the wearer from all diseases and from evil of every kind.

Other anklets are made of precious stones strung together. These are worn under the stocking, and scarcely show through, so fine and small are they.

Phoenician glass or beaten gold anklets carved in hieroglyphics are very popular, and will probably be worn at winter dances.

It is hard for a man to stand on his dignity when he has sore feet.

Even the pessimist who lost both his legs in a railway accident had no kick coming.