THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR

THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued)

The color rose to Guildford Berton's haggard face. To be in the same house with Norah, to go about London with her, to have her to himself for some weeks, just when her heart was sore with the supposed desertion of Cyril Burne! What a chance for him!

"Thank you, you are very kind. I should be glad to run up for a few days, but a little later on. These matters you have mentioned must be seen to, and at once."

"You are always thoughtful and considerate, Guildford. Come up to us, by all means, and as soon as you can."

Norah did not indorse the invitation, but sat, her eyes bent upon her plate. She spoke little during the meal, and rose with a feeling of relief when the butler brought in the port.

Guildford Berton sipped his wine and talked, doing his best to amuse the earl, and it was not until they had got up to join Norah in the drawing-room that he said, quite carelessly:

"Oh, about letters. You will have them forwarded, I suppose?" and he kept his eyes down, as he waited breathlessly for the reply which would mean so much to him.

"Yes, I suppose so. It is a nuisance, however."

"Let me see," said Guildford Berton; "you don't want to be troubled with business letters about the estate, and circulars, and all that kind of thing. I will tell the postoffice people to send them to me, and weed them out before I send them to you. I can detect a business letter by the envelope, I think," and he smiled.

"Thank you," responded the earl, with a bow; "that will save me a great deal of trouble. Pray do so."

Guildford Berton's heart gave a bound of relief and satisfaction. All the Court letters would now pass through his hands. Not only the earl's, but Norah's!

"Very well. I don't think I will come into the drawing-room. The people in town must be written to at once. Please make my excuses to Lady Norah."

He went into the library and sat down to one of the writing-tables, but as he laid the sheet of note-paper, with its gold-emblazoned crest, before him and took up a pen, a sudden suspicion that he was not alone came over him. He glanced over his shoulder cautiously, and with a haggard smile, for he knew that the suspicion was a mere fancy; but he looked round nevertheless, and it seemed to him that a shade, a formless shape, was hovering cloud-like at the end of the room. He got up, and as he approached, the shape appeared to grow less distinct and vanish; but at one moment it had, to his mind, taken the form of Becca, and its face wore the expression of horror which had appeared on hers when she turned and saw him approaching her with the handkerchief tied over his mouth.

He staggered back into the chair and wiped the drops of sweat from his brow and so sat for some minutes. At last he drew the chair up to the table and began to write, but for the life of him he could not resist the awful impulse to glance over his shoulder now and again; and once or twice he fancied that the awful shape still hovered in the corner of the room.

"The earl was right," he muttered to himself, with a ghastly smile; "I should be all the better for a change. But I mustn't go yet. I must wait for Cyril Burne's letter."

On the following Tuesday the earl and Norah went to London.

Norah by that time was looking still paler and more worn, and Lady Ferndale had almost insisted upon the earl's procuring medical advice for her.

"Take her to Sir Andrew," she said, almost imperiously, "and if you have done so by the time I come up"—she was going to London, to stay with friends, in a week from thence—"and she is not decidedly better, I shall take her myself."

Norah was surprised to find the house in Park Lane rather large. She had expected to see a tiny, little villa; whereas, though it would have gone comfortably into one of the wings of the Court, it was one of the largest of the smaller Park Lane places.

She was also surprised to find that there were so many people still left in London. Lady Ferndale and other ladies had assured her that it would be empty; but it seemed to Norah that a great many families were still in town, and she thought that the park looked still very green and pretty from her bedroom window which, it turned out, was the best in the house. She had to thank Mr. Guildford Berton for that. She had also to thank him for the well-appointed brougham which she found at her disposal; for the stock of library books which stood on the drawing-room side table; for the regular supply of flowers which came every morning from she knew not where, little guessing that he saw them cut each morning from the Court greenhouses.

Parliament was sitting, which accounted for the presence of so many people in London, and Norah, with a great deal of surprise, woke, so to speak, to discover that she was famous.

Lady Ferndale had acted as courier in advance, by writing to all her friends an enthusiastic description of Lady Norah Arrowdale, and Norah was astonished by the number of callers and the invitations which poured in upon her.

But for the first few days she was too unwell to go out. The earl wished to send for Sir Andrew, but Norah persuaded him to "give her a few days," as she put it, and spent those few days of grace seated by her window, looking out at the park, and watching with listless, sorrow-laden eyes the few horsewomen who still haunted the row, and the nursemaids, with their children, and long-legged guardsmen, who, whatever the season, were always on view.

At the end of the week, and by the time Lady Ferndale had arrived, she had managed to leave her room, and she fancied that she saw a smile of welcome on the earl's face that was almost tender.

Indeed, he rose from his chair, and took her hand, and he looked into her face, paler and thinner than would have seemed possible for a few weeks' illness to render it, and, as he kissed her, he said:

"Are you better? You—you look very much thinner. Perhaps, after all, Sir Andrew——"

But Norah smiled, and, though it was but a shadowy reflection of the old, free-hearted one, it was still a smile.

"Sir Andrew would pronounce me an imposter, papa, and charge you a double fee. I am all right, and quite well now."

But Lady Ferndale started when she drove round from Queen's Gate the next day, and stared at the worn face aghast.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed, with tender sympathy.

"Do I look so like a ghost, then?" said Norah, smiling.

"N-o, but you certainly are—are thinner. And more lovely than ever," she added, mentally. "Why, I came to take you to a reception this evening; but I think I'd much better put you to bed."

"That would do me no good, and the reception would. I am quite serious," she went on, taking Lady Ferndale's face in both her hands and turning it away from her; for the keen regard of the loving eyes embarrassed her. "I think I am suffering from an attack of dullness; and if you really will take me, I shall be glad to go."

"Very well, dear," said Lady Ferndale, but still rather undecidedly. "But you must wrap up well. You will, won't you? If you caught cold now——"

"Do you think I should die?" asked Norah, with a curious smile. "Oh yes, I will wrap up well, as well as Lord Ferndale used to wrap me up when I left Ferndale at night."

The earl was rather doubtful about giving his consent to her going out so soon, but at ten o'clock Lady Ferndale found her dressed and waiting.

"Where are we going?" asked Norah, as the miniature brougham started, and she laughed as she had to repeat the question, which was at first inaudible through the Indian shawl which Lady Ferndale had insisted upon winding around her throat and over her mouth.

"To the Countess of Derrington's," replied Lady Ferndale. "She is the wife of one of the cabinet ministers, and a very important personage."

"So we shall see some of the members of Parliament, I suppose?" said Norah, trying to throw a tone of interest into her voice, but feeling listless and indifferent.

"Some, I dare say, but there will be all sorts of other people. She is a dear woman, but a little too fond of playing the part of lion-hunter. Of course, it's always interesting to see famous people, but the countess sometimes gets too many of them. One gets confused when so many lions are roaring at the same time, and I'm apt to mix up the great painters with the last new poet or the famous actor, and it's awkward when one has to talk to them."

"I hope I shall not make any mistake of that kind."

"Oh, I'll tell you how to steer clear of it," said Lady Ferndale, smiling mischievously. "When she brings you a great man, the best thing is to say, 'I should have known you at once from your photograph.' That commits you to nothing, you see, and you will soon find out whether he is a painter or an actor or a poet if you listen to him for five minutes, because all the famous men care to talk about nothing but themselves or their particular shop. Oh, dear, what a number of carriages! It will be a crush."

They made their way up the grand staircase, of which the countess was pardonably proud, and as their names were announced, Lady Ferndale had the gratification of observing that "Lady Norah Arrowdale" made a sensation. She had written to so many people dilating on Norah's loveliness that there was a good deal of curiosity to see "Lady Ferndale's paragon," and the Countess of Derrington, as she gave Norah her hand, smiled with more than her usual sweetness.

"It was very good of you to come, dear," she said, to Lady Ferndale, "and very kind of Lady Norah to make an effort. I was so sorry to hear you were ill when I called."

"Many lions to-night?" asked Lady Ferndale.

"Oh, yes, some very nice people, dear Lady Norah. When you have rested I will bring some of them to you."

But Norah had scarcely been seated five minutes before the countess approached her with several persons. Your artist and poet has a keen eye for the beautiful, and there was a general desire to know the lovely girl, the daughter of "the Superfine Earl."

"That's what I call a really beautiful face," said a famous painter to an actor, who had condescended to appear for half an hour.

"A face with a history," he responded, laconically; "Ophelia, who is too proud to go mad, and has resolved to bear her sorrow in silence."

"Nonsense. She is Lord Arrowdale's daughter, and is as little likely to have 'secret sorrow' as you are, my dear fellow."

"All right. You painters look on the surface of things; we actors dive beneath. That girl, for all her loveliness, and notwithstanding she is Lord Arrowdale's daughter, has had some great trouble. And now I think I'll go and get an introduction; I should like to hear her voice."

Norah was a little startled and nervous when she found herself surrounded by men and women bearing names celebrated in art and literature, but after a few minutes the nervous timidity vanished, and she found herself listening and talking, too, with something like enjoyment.

"You have not seen 'The Modern Gallery' yet then, Lady Norah?" said a famous artist. "Ah, yes, you have only just come up to town. I hope you will go. There are some capital pictures there really worth seeing," and he mentioned one or two.

"You have forgotten the best," said another artist, who was standing near. "I mean that one of the new man's, Cyril Burne. I forgot its title, but it's the one with silver ash in it."

Norah had been listening with upturned face, and the name "Cyril Burne" struck upon her so suddenly that it seemed to deprive her of breath and sight and hearing.

The artist who had just spoken saw her face change, saw it grow gradually whiter and the pupils of the lovely eyes dilate as if with some sharp pang, and he took a step forward and bent over her.

"You find the room too hot, Lady Norah?" he said, in a low voice.

But Norah was determined not to be overmastered. She would have to hear his name again and again, especially in London, and was she to wear her heart upon her sleeve and wince and change color every time she heard it?

Her maiden pride came to her rescue, and she raised her eyes to the artist and forced a smile.

"It is a little warm," she said, "but I will not go, thanks."

As she spoke she looked round the room, picking out a gentleman here and there, and asking the artist to tell her who it was, for he seemed to know every one, and had been giving her a great deal of information.

"That is So-and-So," he said, telling her.

"And that gentleman standing by the door?"

"The tall, handsome man, with eyeglasses, looking as if he were tired and bored?"

"Yes," said Norah.

"That is our new poet, the coming man. His name is Wesley—John Wesley. Sounds quite clerical, doesn't it?"

Norah looked round piteously. It seemed as if there was no respite for her. She had just recovered from the pain and misery of hearing Cyril's name, and now here was his dearest friend!

"Looks a genius, doesn't he?" said the artist. "Most people are afraid of him—cynical and all that, you know, but in reality he is the tenderest and kindest-hearted man that ever shed ink. Here he comes; the countess is bringing him to you, I think."

The surmise was correct. Jack had been coaxed into making his appearance among the other lions, but had not been in the salon ten minutes before he had had enough of it, and he was on the point of flying back to his old armchair and short pipe in Winchester street, when he happened to hear the name of Lady Norah Arrowdale.

He asked a lady standing near him to point her out, and his cynical face softened.

"By Jove, I don't wonder at Cyril's madness," he muttered. "Enough to explain the madness in any man. Do you think Lady Derrington would introduce me to that young lady?" he asked aloud, of the lady of whom he had made the previous inquiry.

"I think so," she replied, naively. "Indeed, as I happen to be Lady Derrington, I am sure she will."

"Then I wish you would."

And Lady Derrington, delighted with his readiness and presence of mind, laughingly said:

"Come with me, Mr. Wesley. You see, I know you, though you do not know me; but I am not the author of the famous 'Chaplet of Roses.'"

"And I should begin to wish I were not," he retorted, "if I didn't feel that I owe my presence here to the existence of that much over-rated volume of jingle."

By this time they had reached Norah—the countess amazed at hearing the poet describe the really beautiful verses as jingle—and, touching Norah with her fan to attract her attention, she said:

"Lady Norah, will you let me introduce Mr. Wesley? The 'Chaplet of Roses,' you know," she added, in an undertone.

It chanced that only one or two were standing near her, and Lady Derrington had gone off in quest of some other lions, so that Norah and Jack were standing almost alone.

"I hope I am not altogether a stranger, Lady Norah. It is just possible that you have heard my name mentioned by a great friend of mine, a friend of yours. I mean Cyril Burne," he said, simply.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Wesley," she said, and her words sounded meaningless and mechanical in her ears; "Mr. Burne is not a friend of mine," and she sailed away, proud and swan-like, leaving Jack gaping and dumbstruck.

(To be Continued.)

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TO HUNT GAME IN AFRICA

EARL OF WARWICK AND TWO COMPANIONS START.

Elephants, Lions, Deer, Gigantic Baboons and Little Apes in Abundance.

The Earl of Warwick, his brother, Capt. Greville, and Col. Pattison have started from London for Uganda for a big game shooting expedition, which will be of several months' duration.

This is by no means the first experience the Earl will have had with big game shooting, for he has brought down tigers in India, and has shot the "grizzly" on the Rocky Mountains. Capt. Greville is one of the best shots of the day, while Col. Pattison is a big game hunter of repute.

It is to the latter that the arrangements of the expedition have been entrusted, and in explaining them before starting he laughed at the idea that the perils which he and his companions were going to face would be very dreadful or that the hardships would be over great.

ABUNDANT SPORT.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "we shall take things as comfortably as we can. From Mombassa we shall go up to Nairobi, which is as far as the rail will take us.

"Seven years ago when I was there, Nairobi was simply a patch of desert land, now it is a city with 10,000 inhabitants, and there are a number of white officials.

"We shall use Nairobi as our headquarters, and make various expeditions from there.

"Some of the country is, of course, penetrable thicket, but we shall avoid this and make for the hills and plains which are really beautiful, and literally alive with big game of all kinds. Nowhere on earth, indeed, can so much big game be found.

"There are herds of elephants, plenty of lions, giraffes, endless deer, and gigantic baboons that wander about, followed by an attendant army of small monkeys, whom they boss.

ALL DEPENDS ON LUCK.

"Our prospects? Well, that is hard to say. There is a large element of luck in game hunting. Night after night one may hear lions roaring all around the camp, and yet not see one for weeks together. I have known men go in search of lions for months, and never catch sight of one. On the other hand, one may bag a couple in the course of an afternoon.

"As we reckon about twenty porters to each of us, we shall number all told about sixty. I dare say we may find our way to spots where no white man has ever yet been, and come across many of the numerous native tribes. I suppose that altogether we shall be away five months.

PERIL IN FLANNELETTE.

Deaths by Burning in London Attracts Attention.

The British Home Office authorities are collecting statistics as to the number of deaths caused by the wearing of flannelette clothing, with a view to legislation on the subject.

Wynne Baxter, East London coroner, made this announcement at an inquest concerning the death of Dora Zullo, the wife of an artist. She was combing her hair in front of the fire when her flannelette dressing gown was set alight, and she died from her injuries.

The coroner, after mentioning the official action which was being taken, commented on the peril arising from the wearing of flannelette, and said the number of fatal cases seemed to be on the increase.

A similar cause of death was also investigated by the Preston coroner, a child, three years old, dying owing to injuries received by her flannelette night dress catching fire.

"There is not an atom of flannel in flannelette," remarked the coroner. "Flannelette is merely a name, and the material is all cotton. It is a good deal more dangerous than flannel or ordinary cotton cloth."