THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XXX.

For days Norah scarcely left the earl's side. Paralysis does not always destroy life; it is sometimes satisfied with killing the brain, depriving its victim of the use of his limbs and rendering him helpless and expressionless as a child.

The earl had lived a life of extreme quietude and care for some years past, and it came to his assistance and kept death at bay; but he was speechless and almost helpless.

Gradually a slight improvement set in; they were able to prop him up with pillows, and it seemed to Norah that, though he could not speak, he understood what she said to him.

She noticed, with the improvement in his strength, a certain change in his manner—if indeed, anything so inexpressive could be called manner—toward her. She found that his dim eyes brightened slightly when she spoke to him, and often in the night watches, when she thought him asleep, she would find his eyes set on her fixedly, as if he were trying to remember or say something.

She would have loved her father with all a daughter's love from the first moment of her home-coming; indeed, she had loved him though he had done his best to freeze all tenderness within her; but now that he was thrown upon her care the treasures of love and tenderness in her heart welled out toward him, and she loved him as only a woman can love the being who is dependent upon her.

The nurse and doctor, who had looked upon her as just a fashionable and perhaps spoiled beauty, were inwardly astonished at her devotion, and the doctor declared that it was not he, but Lady Norah, who kept life going in the feeble, stricken frame.

Guildford Berton remained in the house, and, as of old, transacted all business for the earl.

Every now and then he paid a visit to the sickroom, and stood beside the bed murmuring words of comfort to the old man; and at such times the earl fixed his eyes upon him with a strange look which Norah could not interpret; but he never attempted to speak, and showed neither pleasure nor impatience at "his young friend's" visits.

Mr. Petherick had been sent for directly the improvement set in, and tried to awaken a gleam of intelligence in the old man, but failed. The earl looked at him with the same vacant, fixed stare, but displayed no recognition.

"This is very sad for you, my dear," said the old lawyer to Norah, his eyes blinking behind his glasses, as he looked at the lovely face so pale and patient, and recalled the young girl who came so brightly into the sitting-room of the Devonshire cottage. "I am afraid you will knock yourself up. They tell me that you scarcely take any rest."

"Oh, but I do, and this is not hard work sitting here."

"The hardest I can imagine for a young girl so fond of open air as you are," he said, shaking his head. "It is a great responsibility. I wish the young viscount were here," he added, gravely.

"Can he not be found?" asked Norah. She had heard a great deal of this nephew of the earl, this young man who would be the next earl—perhaps so soon!—and master of Santleigh Court. "It seems so strange his keeping in hiding all this time. Surely he must see the account of papa's illness in the papers?"

"Yes, he would if he were in England," said Mr. Petherick, thoughtfully. "But I'm afraid he is not. You see, he is a most extraordinarily erratic young man, and unless he chooses to come forward and declare himself, I'm afraid we shall not find him."

At this moment Guildford Berton entered the room.

"You are speaking of the viscount?" he said, in a low voice. "Every effort is being made to find him, Mr. Petherick."

"Have you advertised in the newspapers?"

"Well, no. Not yet. I scarcely—you see, the earl may recover—I mean sufficiently to be conscious of what is going on, and I fancy—indeed, I am sure—that he would be extremely angry if we took that step."

Mr. Petherick shook his head.

"Besides," said Berton, "I am certain Lord Santleigh is not in England, and unless we know to what part of the world he has betaken himself, we can scarcely advertise."

Mr. Petherick was still afraid of the earl, and he shrank from taking the responsibiltiy of advertising such a public hue and cry.

"Perhaps we had better wait a little longer. That is an extremely sensible young man," he remarked to Norah as Berton left the room. "I don't think I ever met a clearer head for business, and he appears to have been very kind and—attentive."

"Oh, yes," assented Norah, trying to put some warmth of gratitude into her tone, and failing. "Mr. Berton is the closest friend papa has, and has done everything since he has been ill."

"Very kind, very kind, indeed," murmured Mr. Petherick.

He went up and touched the thin white hand lying on the coverlid by way of farewell, and the earl looked at him, and from him to Norah.

"I—er—almost think his lordship is trying to speak to me. I feel certain he knows me. Do you wish to give me any instructions, my lord?" he asked, anxiously; but the earl stared at him vacantly as before, and Mr. Petherick, who remembered his client, a stalwart young man, coughed, and blew his nose, as is the fashion with men when they are nearly moved to tears. Standing there, looking at the wreck before him, he forgot the many slights and snubs he had endured at the hands of "the superfine earl," and recalled only the best side of his nature.

"A most just and upright man, the earl, your father, my dear," he said, with a suspicious falter in his pipy voice. "It distresses me more than I can say to see him in this condition."

And he went his way, as sadly regretful as if the earl had been the sweetest-tempered of men and the mildest of clients.

When a fortnight had passed Norah noticed a certain vague restlessness in the earl's glance.

"It is something he wants," she said to the doctor, with tears in her eyes. "And I cannot think what it is, though I try for hours at a time. Do you think he wants to get back to the Court?"

"It is possible," replied Sir Andrew. "At any rate, the change may do him no harm; indeed, it may benefit him. Try it, Lady Norah—that is, if you wish to."

Now, Norah did not wish to get back very much, though she could scarcely have told why. It certainly would seem as if it could matter very little to her whether she sat in a chair beside his bed in Park Lane or Santleigh Court; she would not acknowledge to herself the true reason—that at Santleigh Court she would not have to live in the same house with Mr. Guildford Berton.

He had been very kind, as devoted to the earl and herself as a man could be, and yet——! She knew that he never entered the room but that a chill swept over her, that she could scarcely meet the glance of his dark, sombre eyes without showing the repugnance which his presence awoke in her.

Lady Ferndale was strongly in favor of the removal to the Court.

"London is the worst place in the world to be ill in, dear," she said; "and I'm thinking of yourself, too. You will be able to get out into the garden, and on the terrace. Oh, yes, let us take him back. Poor, poor old man! I used to laugh at his proud, haughty, King George airs; I wish he's let me laugh at him now!" And her eyes filled with tears; not so much for the earl as for her dear girl, as she called Norah.

Mr. Guildford Berton, as usual took charge of all the arrangements; got the invalid carriage, ordered the special train, had another invalid carriage in readiness at Santleigh station, and behaved, as Lady Ferndale said, as if he were the earl's son.

"Really, dear," she said to Norah, "Guildford Berton has behaved wonderfully, and he fills me with shame and remorse. Not one man in a thousand would have done it in a better manner. He makes no fuss over anything, however much trouble it may give him. I wonder he hasn't insisted upon sitting up with the earl!"

"He has, but that was my place, Lady Ferndale, and I could not resign it to any one, not even to Mr. Guildford Berton."

The change from Park Lane to the Court did the earl neither good nor harm; but as Norah stepped out on the balcony on the evening of their return she drew a deep breath of thankfulness and relief, and tried to persuade herself that it was because of her fondness for the grand old place that she was so glad to get back.

As she stood leaning on the stone rail, and looking sadly and wistfully across the velvety lawns to the woods over which the autumn mist was gathering in a thin, veil-like cloud, Guildford Berton came out and stood beside her.

"I have come to say good-night," he said.

"You—you are going home?" said Norah. "Will you not remain the night?" she added as cordially as she could.

"Thank you, no. I don't think I shall be needed; indeed, you will not allow me to help you. But if I should be, you will send a message to the cottage, will you not?"

"Yes, I will," responded Norah, and her tone was more genial than usual, for she could not help remembering all he had done for the earl and herself. "I should like to try and thank you, Mr. Berton."

"Please do not. I have done so little."

"You have done a great deal—everything," put in Norah.

"So little compared with what I should have liked to have done!"

"When my father is well he will be able to thank you better than I can," said Norah.

"He cannot thank me half so well, even if I deserved or desired thanks. One word from you, Lady Norah, outweighs a world of gratitude, and would repay me for the sacrifice of my life."

Norah flushed. "I—I must go back now," she said.

"I should like to say good-night to the earl," he said.

The earl was sitting up, looking none the worse for his journey, which had been rendered as easy as gold—the great smoother of all things—could make it.

He glanced from Guildford Berton to Norah and back again, and his lips twitched.

"He seems no worse," he said. "Indeed, I think the change has improved him."

"You are better, papa?"

The old man looked at her for a moment, then at the pale, sombre face beside her, and his lips twitched again.

"Do you think—sometimes I cannot help thinking—that there is something on his mind? Something that he wishes to tell me of you? He looks from one to the other of us so strangely."

Guildford Berton was silent for a moment. An idea startling in its audacity, flashed into his mind.

"Can you guess what it is?" Norah asked anxiously, forgetting in her eagerness that it was Guildford Berton she was addressing.

Still he remained silent, and Norah, struck by his silence, looked at him.

"You have some idea. Please tell me what it is It may be something that he wants me to do for him. What is it?"

"Yes, I have an idea," he said. "But"—he paused—"I do not think I can tell you to-night."

"Why not?" asked Norah.

"Not to-night,' he said; "to-morrow, perhaps. No, Lady Norah, I—well, I have not the courage."

"Not the courage!" repeated Norah.

"No," he said. "If I told you my interpretation you would be angry; and I cannot afford that you should be angry with me."

"I do not understand. Why should I be angry, Mr. Berton"

"Will you give me your promise that what I may say to you shall not make you angry with me?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I do not think you would say anything that would make me angry, Mr. Berton," she said, quietly.

"Then I will tell you. I have your promise, remember, Lady Norah! You ask me if I can interpret the expression which the earl's face wears when he looks from you to me. The answer bears reference—close reference to you."

"To me?" said Norah, mechanically.

"Yes," he said, looking at her from under his eyes. "Will you carry your mind back to the night of the earl's seizure?"

Norah inclined her head slightly.

"You will remember that I came in late, and went to the earl in the library. I went to consult him about some business matter, but I found him strangely averse to discussing it. He seemed to have something on his mind. I have no doubt that the presentiment of his coming illness was upon him, and it was only natural that he should be dwelling upon the subject nearest his heart—yourself."

Norah's hand went forth, and found the earl's and held it.

"He spoke of you, Lady Norah, of the joy and comfort your presence brought him, and then"—he paused and hesitated, but it was too late to draw back, and with a covert glance at her he went on, smoothly, softly—"and then he spoke of myself."

He waited to see if she would speak, but Norah remained silent.

"The earl and I have been such close friends for so long, Lady Norah, and he was so quick to notice any change in the demeanor of those about him, that it was not surprising he should remark an alteration in my manner, though I have tried to hide it from him, from all. That night he asked me what it was that weighed upon my mind. I tried to evade the question, but he had discovered the truth, and he frankly charged me with it. Can you not guess its nature, Lady Norah?"

Norah shook her head.

"He had been watching me, it seems, and had caught a glimpse of my heart, though I thought that I had succeeded in hiding it. Lady Norah, the earl, your father, asked me as bluntly as his courtesy would permit, if the change he had observed in me had any reference to you—and I admitted it. I told him the truth. I confessed that I loved you, Lady Norah!"

Norah's hand closed tightly on the earl's, and a shudder shook her. She could not have spoken to save her life, but simply sat, her eyes fixed upon him with wild incredulity and amazement.

"The confession was wrung from me; I could not have kept it back; but even as I made it I felt how hopeless was the love which I had fought against and had fondly trusted I had hidden from every one. I knew—I have never forgotten—the difference in our positions. I realize it now, this moment, as keenly as I have ever done. But there is no gulf too wide for love to bridge. I had set my heart upon one as far above me as the stars in the heavens. But, though one may despair of ever reaching the stars, one may love them and look up to them with longing eyes. You have been my star, Lady Norah, and I have worshiped, I worship you still. That was my confession, Lady Norah, and I expected to hear from the lips of the earl a denunciation of my audacity and—a dismissal. I waited patiently, as a criminal waits for the passing of the sentence which will consign him to lifelong misery. But it was not pronounced. The earl was not surprised. Remember that he had discovered my secret and read my heart. He was not surprised and—he was not angry. Heaven knows how much above my poor deserts he esteems me! So much that, in place of condemnation and rebuke, he spoke—Heaven bless him!—he looked gratefully toward the wan, drawn face lying back on the pillows—"he spoke words of comfort and encouragement. Ah, Lady Norah, none but I and those dear to him can fully appreciate the nobility of his nature! It was I who shrank with unfeigned humility from confessing my love; it was he, the noble father, who, consenting to forget the difference in our rank, bade me hope."

Norah's gaze grew more full of horror.

"Even more than that," he went on after a pause; "he was good enough to tell me, with all the frankness of a father, that he had seen my love for you, and that he would not only give his consent to my suit, but his countenance and generous approval! Lady Norah, it is with the sanction of your father, with the knowledge that I have his best wishes, that I kneel at your feet and avow my love!" and he dropped on one knee and held out his hand to her almost in the attitude of worship.

"I—I have surprised you, alarmed you! I should have prepared you, and yet—ah, Lady Norah, surely you cannot have been blind to the love I bear you. During all these months you must have seen how completely and entirely I have been your slave. There is no hour in which I have not thought of you; no moment in which I have not striven to find some way of proving myself less unworthy of you. Yes, though I have tried to crush the love out of my heart, and have told myself that there could be no hope, no gleam of hope for me, I could not succeed. Such love as I bear for you cannot be crushed; it is the life of a man's life; it abides with him unto death. I could no more help loving you than I could help breathing. Think, then, with what joy I heard that noble-hearted man tell me that I might plead with you, might lay my love and my life at your feet, and, if I could, win you for my wife! Lady Norah, it is not only I who speak and implore you to say 'Yes,' but the father who loves you and whom you love."

"It—it is false!" broke from her lips.

"You doubt me! You disbelieve!" he murmured, sorrowfully.

"You say that—that my father sanctioned, consented——"

"More than sanctioned," he said, softly, pleadingly. "Must I tell you all? You force me. Lady Norah, it has long been his wish that you should be my wife!"

Heaven above knows whether the stricken man, whose presence Guildford Berton had disregarded as completely as if he had been already dead, heard and understood; but at that moment a sound like a faint moan broke from his shrivelled lips, and, as Norah sprang up and turned to him with a cry, a shudder ran through Guildford Berton and his face blanched. But in a moment he had shaken off the dread which had seized upon him.

"You see, you hear! Ah, if he could speak—and would to Heaven he could!—he would bear me witness."

It was a fiendish stroke, and its very audacity made it successful.

Norah looked into the earl's face, working with a piteous effort to regain the power of speech, and she accepted Guildford Berton's interpretation. With a low cry of despair and horror she flung herself down, and hid her face upon the old man's hands, for he looked across her at Berton, his face still working, but with vacant, expressionless eyes.

"Norah, for Heaven's sake, for his sake, do not—do not treat me like this! What have I done—what am I—that you should shrink from me?" He stopped suddenly and started, for a voice, audible to his own ears only, seemed to whisper in ghastly tones, "Murderer!"

"Norah speak to me. Tell me that you forgive me, at least. Is it such an unpardonable crime to have loved you? Ah, how could I help it? I who lived in the sunshine of your presence——"

"Go—go!" dropped from her lips.

"You—you will not hear me?" he said, hoarsely.

"I—I have heard you," she said, almost inaudibly.

"If—if he could but speak!" he murmured, sorrowfully.

She turned to her father, and caught at his arm, as if imploring him to recall his consent or deny it.

"Why should you hate me so? Is it—it is because I have come too late, because there is another?"

"You shall not speak another word to me!" she said with parted lips, her breath coming fast and furiously, her hands clinched tightly. "Even—even if all you said be true, it would make no difference. Take my answer, Mr. Berton. I"—she caught her breath and spoke slowly, with a hauteur he had never seen her exhibit before—"I cannot marry you; and now, will you go, please?"

"Is that the last word between us? You choose to disregard his wish, you fling my love in my face! Do you think that I am the man to take such a dismisal quietly, patiently? You little know——" He pulled himself up, and bent toward her imploringly. "Ah, forgive me; I don't know what I am saying. My heart is torn and rent by your coldness, your disdain. Have pity on me, Norah——"

She moved forward slowly, painfully as it seemed, and her hand went toward the bell.

"Stay!" he said, abruptly. "I will go. But for God's sake, have some mercy! Do not let us part like—like this. If I cannot be what I would to you, at least do not take your friendship from me." His voice grew cooler and more composed. "Remember how much I suffer by your rejection, Lady Norah, and—and let that plead for me. I have spoken wildly—madly; forget what I have said, and—and—let things be as they were between us."

Her hand dropped from the bell, and, cringingly, like a whipped dog, he tried to take her hand to lift it to his lips, but Norah shrank back beyond his reach and pointed to the door.

"I—I will try and forget, for his sake," she said, with difficulty; "but go!"

Then, as he left the room, she fell forward, her head bowed upon her hands, and one word broke from her lips:

"Cyril!"

(To be continued).

YOUNG FOLKS

A QUESTION.

I.

Little Lucy Locket
She hadn't any pocket—
No place to carry anything at all;
While Lucy's brother Benny
He has so very many,
In which to put his marbles top or ball,
That when he's in a hurry
'Tis sometimes quite a worry
To find the one he wants among them all.

II.

Now why should Lucy Locket
Not have a little pocket—
A handy little pocket in her dress?
And why should brother Benny,
Who doesn't need so many,
Be favored with a dozen, more or less?
The reason, if you know it,
Be kind enough to show it,
For really 'tis a puzzle, I confess!

CRAZY PICTURES.

"Never mind if it does rain. Mamma always thinks of something extra nice for rainy days," said Harold.

"I have thought of something now," said mamma. "Get some pieces of smooth brown paper for Frankie and little Helen and some of that pretty green cardboard for Esther and Mabel, and you and Leon may use your scrapbooks. I will pick out some old magazines, and Leon may get some paste. Esther you may take the cloth off the dining table, and spread out some newspapers. I am going to show you how to make crazy pictures."

The children ran to collect the things, and mamma sent Harold for both pairs of scissors and the shears, and Esther for some empty boxes and covers to lay the parts of pictures in.

"Now," said mamma, giving the things round to the different ones as she spoke, "you may cut the brown paper into sheets about six by eight inches; you may cut the cardboard the same size.

"Now all of you little ones may cut out the pictures of everything in the advertisement pages that is alive, but don't try to cut them close to the picture; let the older ones do that. Harold may punch the sheets on one end, so they can be tied together to make a book when they are done. You could make a book at first, but if you spoil a page it looks badly to cut it out, so I like sheets best."

Then mamma cut out several pictures quickly, and cut off their heads and arms and legs, putting the heads into one box, the arms into another, the legs into a third, and the bodies into a fourth. Sometimes she left the arms with the body, as it would spoil some of the bodies to have them cut off.

As soon as all the children had pictures enough to cut so there were quite a number in each box, mamma gave a body to each child, and then while one was picking out a pair of legs, another was choosing arms, and another a head. As soon as anyone had a picture ready he pasted it on his sheet or book, and a crazy-looking set of pictures they were!

The little children's were the funniest, for sometimes they placed feet where hands should be, and they made the body turn one way and the head another. Sometimes a girl had a dog's head, or a man had the body of a child and the skirts of a woman. One boy drawing a sled had the legs of an ostrich.

They were all surprised when Maggie came to set the table for luncheon. "Let's send these pictures to the Children's Hospital," said Mabel, "and they will make the children there laugh, too."

WOKE FROM TRANCE.

Strange Case of Man Who Traveled 6,000 Miles.

A curious case of lapse of memory has just been revealed at Sydney, Australia on the arrival from the northern districts of New South Wales recently of an American, whose remembrance was of Los Angeles, Cal. The American's story is vouched for by two Sydney doctors who have investigated the circumstances.

The mysterious traveler left Parahoe, in California, a few days before Easter, intending to join his wife and family at Los Angeles. He remembers arriving there, but has no recollection of what happened afterward.

He awoke to find hiself lying under a tree in the Australian bush, and was immensely astonished at seeing around him many unknown forms of vegetation. He noticed that his hands were hard and rough, though he had never consciously done a day's hard work.

A bullock driver passed him shortly after his awakening, and he at once inquired the way to Los Angeles. The man stared in astonishment, and answered that Hill End was the name of the nearest township.

The man without a memory thereupon asked the date, and was told that it was late in October and that he was in New South Wales. He worked his way to Sydney, a distance of some hundreds of miles, and is now trying to obtain employment there to get money to return to his family.

He is in total ignorance as to their whereabouts and as to his own doings during the six onths between April and October.

"They say that fringes are not much worn now, but I'm hanged if I believe it!" muttered Penniless, as he glanced at the bottoms of his trousers.