

His Uncle's Heir.

CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED.

Frank lifted the small trembling hand that touched his arm reverently to his lips. How should he ever be grateful enough for, ever repay the loyal love that dared so much for his sake?

"Heaven bless you, my darling!" he whispered fervently, and then turned to her father, anticipating some terrible explosion of wrath, and fervently hoping that it would fall upon his head alone.

But none came. Mr. Verner stared blankly in the girl's face, then turned his head aside with a smothered groan.

"Oh, child, you break my heart!" he cried below his breath. "Go, Essie with your sister. I am not angry; I shall not quarrel—all that folly is forgotten; but I have some business with—some bad news for—Frank!"

"For me!" the young man broke in wonderingly, while Essie crept only the closer to him, and held her ground with that strange new courage that love had given.

"If there is bad news, I must help him to bear it," she said; and her soft eyes met her father's fearfully.

"What is it, sir?" Frank asked, having run every possible and impossible calamity over in his mind and found none that could effect him very nearly. "No bark can break and ruin me, and I'm so nearly alone in the world that, all being well here, death can hardly touch me."

"Death!" Mr. Verner echoed the always terrible word with an emphasis that made it more ghastly than ever; his bloodshot eyes rested on the young man's face, as though they would pierce to his soul. "Death can harm every man—and you have—relatives, if not friends."

"Relatives and friends too, I hope," Frank broke in warmly; "but they are all well at De Walden Court."

"All!" the other repeated, with the same strange tone and look.

"Yes, all. At least, I left them so this morning." He paused, and grew very pale, suddenly recalling Anita de Walden's sorrowfully spoken words—"The shadow comes nearer and nearer, and it means harm to those I love, or to me."

Had that wild, dreamy terror been prophetic? Had harm come in any strange and terrible shape to the graceful girl wife or her gray haired lord? His heart throbbled with an unselfish dread as he said hurriedly—

"Oh, what is it? You speak of them, I know. Is my uncle—is Lady de Walden ill?"

There followed a brief pause—then Mr. Verner asked sternly—

"Is there no one else at De Walden Court?"

"The lad—little Georgie? Yes; but surely it is not he who—"

"Is dead? It is."

Frank stared at the speaker almost incredulously. It was so impossible to associate the grim and terrible idea of sudden death with the bright faced noble little lad who had trotted beside him through the De Walden meadows twenty-four short hours ago. He could still feel about his own the warm close clasp of the fat baby fingers, could hear the merry prattle of the baby voice, and meet the frank glance of the baby eyes that were as clearly blue as the summer heavens. Something rose in his throat with the recalled remembrance, and almost choked him, while tears of which he was not even aware fell upon her white hands.

She had placed poor little Georgie on her own bed, and sat beside him, never moving her hot eyes from the poor little face that the women could not look upon without a fresh burst of choking tears. She would not suffer any one to touch the child until Sir George came home. There was something appalling in the utter calm with which she kept her waiting watch; and by-and-by the women crept one by one away and left her alone with her dead.

And presently Sir George came in, his face gray with pain, the veins on his forehead swelling and standing out like knotted whip cord, his breath coming in great gasping sobs. He brushed past the pale and frightened servants who clustered together on the stairs and about the bed room door, and, going straight to the bed, gathered the pale little figure to his breast in a very agony of rage and pain.

"My boy, my Georgie!" he cried, his voice hoarse with agony, his strong frame shaken with the sobs that seemed to rend his massive chest. "My little murdered child!"

Even this did not move Anita. She heeded him apparently no more than she had heeded the servants as they came and went, the only difference being that she suffered him to touch the child. Her eyes still blazed with the same fierce lustre, her hands were still locked in a rigid clasp.

And for once Sir George had no thought, no word, no look, for her. She suffered, of course she did! Was not his very heart riven, his very soul on fire with a wild craving for revenge on the coward whose ruthless hands had taken that sweet child life?

Presently his voice rang out, a shrill harsh note that it had never known before mingling with its deeper tones and giving a strange passionate intensity to his words.

"And this is his work, his vengeance—the coward, the—"

"Whose work?"—the frozen calm was broken through at last. Anita sprang to her feet, and something, a realizing horror, a comprehension that had not been in them yet, seemed to leap suddenly into her shining eyes; her rigid lips unclenched, her breath came thick and fast.

"Whose work—oh, George, whose work?"

Sir George's gray face and tear reddened eyes were slowly raised.

"Who but the one man had cause to hate our darling—my nephew Frank de Walden?"

"No, no!" Anita's hands were raised and passionately clasped above her head; her voice rose in a shrill scream that echoed through all the house of mourning like the cry of a lost spirit, and brought the servants pouring in pell mell. "Not he—not Frank! Oh, Heaven, no! He would not harm my darling! No; it was—"

She broke down then, with a strange, gurgling cry, flung out both arms, and fell forward upon her face. When they raised her, face, dress, and hands were deluged with blood. She had broken a large vessel on the lungs, and even the least experienced person there knew that her life was draining away.

And in truth she never recovered consciousness, never spoke again. The agony of a long lifetime had been condensed in to those few hours, and mind and body had

alike broken down under the unnatural strain.

She lay for some hours, looking like some lovely monumental figure in her perfect pallor and perfect calm, slowly breathing her life away; and, before the evening shadows fell, Sir George was doubly bereaved. The mother and child so cruelly parted here had met again in the immortal sphere.

The two young men had gone straight from Mr. Verner's house to the railway station; but only one of them had been suffered to reach De Walden Court, for Frank was arrested as he entered the train, and the man who had him in charge was naturally anxious to place a prisoner so important in immediate safe-keeping.

Lord Croxford grew very pale, and manifested an unexpectedly pugnacious disposition when he saw the significant gleam of steel in the detective's hand; but Frank restrained him with an imploring glance, and could only gnaw his blonde moustache, and feel savagely miserable and helpless.

"It must have come sooner or later," Frank said, as they parted. He was wonderfully calm and self-possessed, though his eyes gleamed with a feverish brightness, and his handsome face was very pale. "But I wish—I wish I had seen Sir George. You will go to him, Croxford, and say how I grieve for my little cousin, for him, for—"

He paused suddenly, with a blank face; then added slowly—"But how if he thinks me guilty?"

"Then he is a fool for his pains," Lord Croxford broke in, with all the roughness of genuine feeling. "You guilty, Frank! I would as soon believe in my own guilt."

Frank answered only by a grateful look; and the other went on hastily—

"Of course, I will act as your deputy, and bring my report to-morrow. Keep up your spirits, old fellow. These mad mistakes can never last long, you know; and—Heaven bless you, and good-bye!"

And, with a warm hand clasp, the good hearted young Viscount hurried away, horribly ashamed of the tears that dimmed his glasses and were an honor to his manhood, if he had had but the sense to see it.

It was late when he arrived at De Walden Court; but only the faintest glimmer of light broke through the massive ivy-grown frontage of the great house. The vast entrance hall was all in shadow, and the kindly messenger, already sufficiently depressed felt his heart sink lower and lower as he stood in that gloomy ante-chamber, awaiting Sir George's permission to come in.

It was hard to get and long in coming, and only obtained at last by a desperate use of Frank de Walden's name. Lord Croxford winced to see how even the man who took his message and ushered him finally into Sir George's presence stared and colored angrily at the sound.

The great library, in which the stricken man sat, was as dark as all the rest of the house. Croxford could not see the bent shaking figure that raised itself from the great arm chair at his entrance, nor the fierce swollen eyes that turned angrily to his till his attention was drawn in that direction by the sound of a harsh querulous voice.

"Well, sir, you have thrust yourself upon my misery. What excuse have you to make?"

Lord Croxford was certainly not accustomed to such an unceremonious style of address; but he did not resent it now. He was not thinking of himself or his own dignity; his heart ached for this broken, desolate old man almost as much as for his injured friend.

"Forgive me, Sir George"—he spoke, after a little hesitating pause, with infinite gentleness and unfeigned sympathy. "Heaven knows I would not intrude upon your grief; but I come to tell you that Frank—"

"That they have taken him, that he is caught?" Sir George broke in, his voice trembling, his eyes ablaze with savage exultation. "Tell me that and I will thank and bless you, sir, as you were never thanked and blessed before."

Lord Croxford was silent. Not all his pity for the misery maddened man before him could keep the angry blood from his face, the angry sparkle from his eyes as he listened to that cruelly unjust speech, but, by a mighty effort, he did keep back all angry words; and his silence wrought the other to frenzy.

"Is that your news? Is Frank de Walden in safe custody?" he broke out violently striking his hand with cruel force upon the massive table; and his blood shot eyes shone with a cruel fire.

"Yes, that last injustice has been done the man you wrong so foully!" Lord Croxford answered, with a sort of bitter calm. "Frank has been arrested for a crime which it is simply monstrous to associate with his name. He is absolutely incapable of cruelty to any one, and he loved your child."

Sir George gave a cry that was like the roar of a wild beast in fiercest pain.

"Loved!" he echoed savagely, "the child who robbed him of his heritage, who stood between him and his promised wife! No; we were mad to trust the innocent creature in his power! We might have known what his resignation meant."

"You might have known your nephew," Lord Croxford said, with a restrained passion that was full of dignity. "I have known him as man and boy; and I know as surely as I know that the sun shines in the heaven, and you and I both live and breathe, that whatever the evidence against him, Frank is innocent."

Even Sir George seemed momentarily impressed by the passionate conviction of the young man's speech. He stared stupidly into the shadows, then broke in with a harsh discordant laugh.

"Whatever the evidence!" he cried with a terribly mocking. "Your faith may be strong indeed if it survive that test! Do you know, sir, that your friend took the child out for a walk, a walk from which neither of them returned, for he went straight to London, and the boy—oh, Heaven, my little helpless Georgie!—was only brought home dead!"

His head sank forward upon his folded arms; even the anger died out of his voice, which became a mere wail of agony. For the second time that day Lord Croxford felt the tears rush blindingly to his eyes. He drew a little nearer to the stricken man, his kind heart aching with the burden of a painful pity. He felt so powerless to help or heal in the presence of this tragic woe. His faith in Frank was utterly unshaken; but the plain fierce words had shown him more clearly than ever the deadly peril in which his friend stood.

"Forgive me, Sir George," he said almost tenderly—and his voice, gentle as it was, was broken, and thrilled with the nervous agitation that possessed him—"for worlds I would not say one word to irritate or anger

you; but, for truth's sake, I must answer you still. I do not know, I cannot guess, how the terrible chain that links Frank's name with this most hideous crime got itself forged; but I know that it is a chain of falsehood, that it can and shall be broken."

"Break it then!" the old man answered savagely. "You are a good friend and a strong advocate, sir; but I think you and your client will both find that chain is strong enough to hang him!"

Implacable hate gleamed in the swollen eyes, and sounded in the roughened voice. Lord Croxford felt that it was useless, for the present at least, to contend with one who was deaf alike to reason and appeal, though he felt, with added pang, how terrible this man's full conviction of his nephew's guilt would influence the public mind. He sighed involuntarily as he decided this; and the sound attracted Sir George's attention. He eyed the young man keenly, and, for the first time, made some faint attempt to speak with reasonable courtesy.

"I do not blame you, sir. Thinking as you do, you are right to stand by your friend in such a time as this. But when you know, as I know now, his shameful guilt—"

"Say rather when you know how great a wrong you have done him, you will be glad that he had a friend," Lord Croxford said hurriedly. "That day will come, Sir George; but we shall never see the one of which you speak. Till then, good-bye." He moved towards the door, then came back again, and spoke with a resolute effort. "One question more, I must tell all that has passed between us to Frank, and, Heaven knows, it will be a bitter task. I would gladly find one gleam of hope to give him. Does the poor mother, does Lady de Walden share your conviction of his guilt?"

Sir George stared, as though he hardly understood him at first; then the blood rushed hotly over the gray face, and the eyes emitted one vivid flash as he cried, with a cruel laugh—

"Yes, you can take some comfort to your friend—can tell him his cruel vengeance is complete—Lady de Walden is dead!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a terrible story that the next day's paper set forth, a terrible story that May Verner read by her unconscious sister's side; and, reading it, the brave and loving girl almost felt that her heart might break.

Mr. Verner's report had been substantially correct. Lady de Walden, following her husband's instructions, had instituted an instant search through the extensive grounds of De Walden Court. The servants, exploring in all directions, had found no trace of the missing child; but presently there had been heard a scream upon a scream issuing from the direction of the shrubbery, and all crowding there had found the unhappy mother clasping the murdered baby in her arms and frantically calling to Heaven to give her back her child.

They were stolid, unimpressible folk who looked upon that scene of utter agony; but not one among them will forget it till his dying day. The baby figure had been so full of life and health an hour back, all rigid and dreadful now, the golden hair floating back from the blackened swollen face and wildly staring eyes, the girl mother in the tragic majesty of an agony that drove her really mad. They tried to take the little victim from her, for the burden was far beyond her strength; but she struck their hands fiercely away, and staggered back through the brilliant morning sunshine that gleamed on her bare golden head and blazing eyes and on the pitifully altered face that lay upon her breast.

"My lady, my lady, cry for Heaven's sake!" her maid had implored, kneeling at her feet, while the tears ran like rain down her own hoarse ruddy face; but Anita did not even seem to hear her or feel the scalding drops that fell upon her white hands.

She had placed poor little Georgie on her own bed, and sat beside him, never moving her hot eyes from the poor little face that the women could not look upon without a fresh burst of choking tears. She would not suffer any one to touch the child until Sir George came home. There was something appalling in the utter calm with which she kept her waiting watch; and by-and-by the women crept one by one away and left her alone with her dead.

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Comfort for Can't-Get-Aways.

You can walk so comfortably in the parks, and have your choice of seats, as there will be no disagreeable crowd, and no dust from carriages.

You can study geography, and improve yourself so much, by engaging all your travelling friends to write to you to tell you what they are seeing, and you can follow them—on the map.

You will feel so much more comfortable watching over your own premises, instead of leaving them to servants, who will have in followers, and perhaps set the house on fire.

You will avoid those long, cold, dull evenings in the country, and especially by the seaside, when you are tired out, can't get a book, and are ashamed to have a fire, and you can spend them in the comfort of your own house.

You can fetch up such a deal of reading which you have never had time to manage during the season, and besides, can resolutely set yourself to Spencer, Tyndall and other really instructive writers.

You can see a great deal of your poor and unrepresentable relations, and ask them to tea, and advise them as to the bringing up of their children, and otherwise discharge the duties of consanguinity.

And you cannot think how much more you will enjoy a country holiday in 1885 if you omit taking one in 1884; besides that, when your friends return to town, you will have so much more leisure to listen to all their narratives of travel, having none to bore them with in return.

A gang of Italian laborers near Saratoga were recently cut down ten cents a day. Instead of striking, they cut an inch off their shovel blades at night. The boss asked what it meant, and one of the men replied, "Not so much pay, not so much dirt left; all right, job last the more long. Italian no fool like Irishman; he no strikes."

Men Ignorant of Fire.

I do not know of any but a single record where natives of a newly discovered country did not know the use of fire: that one case was on Island Fauna Loa, or Bodwitch's Island, discovered on the 29th of January, 1841, by W. H. Hudson, of the United States South Sea Surveying and Exploring Expedition.

Capt. Hudson relates: "The natives were at first very shy of the boat; but the Hawaiian who were in them soon induced them to approach, and to enter into trade, and finally enticed them alongside the ships. On coming near they began a song or chant, holding up their paddles and mats, and shouting 'kaifou tamatau.' They resembled the natives of Otafou, or Duke of York's Island, wore the same kind of mats, eye-shades and ornaments, and some were tattooed in the same manner. Some, however, were tattooed in a different style, being ornamented with a variety of arrows on the forehead and cheeks. They were all finely formed and manly in appearance, with pleasing countenances that expressed good nature."

"They were eager enough for trade, and soon disposed of all they had to exchange; few presents failed to entice them on board. They appeared cheerful, laughing heartily at anything that struck them as ridiculous."

"The population of the island is estimated to be about six hundred souls, most of whom dwell in the town."

"There was no signs of places for cooking, nor any appearance of fire, and it is believed that all their provisions are eaten raw. What strengthened this opinion was the alarm the natives felt when they saw the sparks emanating from the flint and steel, and the emission of smoke from the mouths of those who were smoking cigars."

The writer of this article was on board the Peacock, and can vouch for the verity of Capt. Hudson's account of our interviews with the natives, and also that they eat their entire food without cooking, but also had the greatest dread of fire in any form. We saw no traces of charcoal or ashes in their village or town, and we fully understood them as to their food and how it was taken. It consisted entirely of coconuts and pandanus fruits; fish, echini, and other products of the sea; the few birds mostly seen there, were not regarded as food, and even if they were, could not have been easily obtained or relied on for supplies, the population being large in proportion to the island's size.

A Cheap Beehive.

E. L. Conger of Maple Creek has a couple of swarms of bees which came into his possession under peculiar circumstances. About two years ago, late in the fall, a swarm came to his place, taking refuge between the siding and wall of a little addition to his house, going in through a knot hole in the siding. Coming so late in the season they were unable to lay up enough honey to keep them, and they all died during the winter. Last week Monday, about noon, another large swarm came in exactly the same way, and a few hours later another and larger swarm followed suit, all going in through the same knot hole and making themselves at home in the space between the walls and the studding. The last swarm would comprise about a half bushel. They are now busily at work preparing to settle down for a permanent residence. The instinct of bees is remarkable, but this is one of the strangest cases we have heard of for a long time.

Fish-Eating Plants.

Prof. Baird, of the National Museum, has received from England a specimen of an aquatic fish-eating plant, known as the great bladderwort, which has been discovered to be peculiarly destructive to young fish. The plant is large, has no roots, but floats free in the water, and its leaves bear small bladders which entrap the fish fry. Twelve or fifteen species of the plant are found within the limits of the United States, and it abounds in the Fish Commission carp ponds in Washington, where it has been introduced at considerable labor and expense, having been heretofore regarded as excellent fish food. Prof. Baird will warn carpiculturists to destroy the plant wherever found, as he believes that millions of fry must be annually caught in the little bladder traps.

Oh! how tired and weak I feel, I don't believe I will ever get through this spring-cleaning! Oh yes you will if you take a bottle or two of Dr. Carson's Stomach Bitters to purify your blood and tone up the system. In large bottles 50 cents.