

# STRONGER THAN LIFE

CHAPTER V.—(CONTINUED)

"I cannot be conventional!" he exclaims, frowning a little. "I have my own ideas about choice of subject and manner of dealing with it, and I shall adopt the ideas of no other man living."

"But your idea may not please the public."

"If the public cannot understand me, it is their own loss."

"And, meanwhile, you and those belonging to you may starve."

He is silent, looking down at me—at the girl in the long pale gown who dares to stand there and call not only his own steadfastness of purpose in question, but the principles of his art.

"Truth must conquer in the end," he says at last.

"If it is backed up by deliberate, mechanical, matter-of-fact toil."

"I will work for you, Allie, if you will only give me the chance?"

"Will you work for me, Gerard?"

He bends down and kisses my hair—a quick passionate kiss.

"As long as there is breath in my body, darling."

"Then I will tell you what I will do," I say gravely and deliberately. "On the day that you sell a picture for one hundred pounds, if you come and ask me to marry you, Gerard Baxter, I will say 'Yes.'"

"For the sake of the hundred pounds, Allie?"—smiling a little.

"No," I answer, smiling back again; "but because it will prove to me that you have begun to work."

"You will marry me then, Allie?"—

"Yes."

"I won't be long painting that picture!" he exclaims boyishly. "My darling, do you know how happy you have made me?"

He is standing close to me, his arms round me, his dark head lowered against my fair one, our two foolish hearts full of a foolish dream never to be fulfilled.

"Allie!" they call to me from the other end of the room, turning their dazzled eyes from the piano and Crauford's long haired friend to peer into our shadowy space of twilight. "Allie, come and sing 'Galla Water.'"

I move down the room in my long dress a faint white presence with no spot of darker colour about it than the bunch of heliotrope fastened into the coil of filmy lace about the throat, and followed by a darker figure which looks like its shadow in the faint perspective of the long shadowy room.

"We want you to sing 'Galla Water,' Allie, and 'Logie o' Buchan.'"

And I sit down and sing them with the careless gaiety, the dash and insouciance without which, Olive Deane tells me, I should not be Allie Scott. But all the time I am thinking of two shadowy figures outlined against a faint gold-green sky, of a star that flickered into red and emerald, of a voice that had said "And you will marry me, Allie?" and of another voice that had answered "Yes."

"Your aunt has come"

Such is Mary Anne's greeting to me in the hall of No. 33, Carleton Street.

"My aunt! What aunt?"

"Your aunt from the country. She came about an hour ago, and was that surprised to find you had gone out!"

"But what has she come for? Is anything wrong at home?"

"Not a thing in the world. She says she wrote to tell you she was coming, and to have a room ready, because she meant to stay."

"Meant to stay!" I repeat, thinking of the unopened letters of the morning.

"So she says. She's in the drawing-room now, giving it to the mistress."

"Giving her what?" I ask stupidly.

"A piece of her mind, she says; but I think it's the whole of it!" the maid-of-all-work says, grinning. "It's all along of the Count she has come, I expect. She says Mrs. Wauchope deceived her about having no lodgers but the Misses Pryce."

Who can have told aunt Rosa anything about him? And what a state of mind she must have been in before she would decide to come up to town in such a hurry!

"Aunt Rosa!" I exclaim, in a tone of the most innocent astonishment. "My dear aunt Rosa, I am so sorry you arrived while I was out."

The sentence may be ambiguous; but aunt Rosa does not perceive it.

"So am I," she says, when she planted a cold kiss upon my nose. "I don't think you came up to London to to evening parties."

"But I was with the Rollestons, aunt—perfectly respectable people."

"Humph! And how did you come home?"

"They sent me home in their carriage—they always do."

"I wrote to you yesterday. Is there anything the matter with the postal arrangements?"

"Not that I know of, aunt Rosa."

"Then am I to conclude that you never open my letters?"

"I was in a hurry this morning—breakfast was late, and I was afraid of being late at Madame Cronhelm's. I did glance through your letter; but I must have overlooked anything you said about coming to town."

She says nothing to me about Mrs. Wauchope's contraband lodger, but I know, as well as if she had told me, that somebody has been officious enough to write and tell her all about him. I suspect Mrs. Deane; but I ask aunt Rosa no questions, nor does she volunteer any information to-night.

"It seems Mrs. Wauchope has no spare room for me. In those circumstances—"

"My dear aunt Rosa, you can have my room. I will sleep here on the sofa, and just run in there to dress. There is a

dressing-room—indeed perhaps I had better have a shake-down in the dressing-room, if Mrs. Wauchope can manage it."

"She is managing it now. I don't like that woman, Rosalie. She has a most virulent tongue."

"She has always been civil to me, aunt Rosa."

"Oh, because you just let her do as she pleases! Have you been burning nothing but Scotch coal since you came up to town?"

"I have had very good fires, auntie."

"I am surprised at it, then. That coal in the grate is nothing but rubbish, though I dare say you are paying the very highest price for it. And the tea she gave me was execrable—perfectly execrable!"

"I'm not much judge of tea, aunt Rosa," I say yawning. "I hope you've brought me up some jam from Woodhay, though, and some of our own butter."

"I've done no such thing. You're coming home with me to-morrow—there's been enough and to much of this folly, and your uncle is very sorry he was ever foolishly persuaded to giving his consent to it."

"To-morrow, aunt Rosa!"

"Not a day later than to-morrow."

"But don't you want to see something of London, auntie?"

"I want to see the last of it. I'm only sorry I didn't know what I know now three weeks ago, and your ridiculous freak would have come to an end a great deal sooner. How your uncle Todhunte could ever have agreed to such an egregious piece of folly passes my comprehension!"

Poor aunt Rosa! If she only knew the steed was stolen, how much less clatter she would have made in locking the door! In my heart I confess she is right. I have got into mischief here in London or into what she would consider mischief. If I had never come up to Mrs. Wauchope's furnished lodgings, I should probably never have met

"That landscape-painter  
Which did win my heart from me."

"I cannot possibly go home to-morrow, aunt Rosa," I say, laying aside my squirrel-lined cloak and the fan which I have been holding in my hand since I came into the room. "I must tell Madame Cronhelm that I am leaving town, and I must say good-bye to the Rollestons."

"You can write to them both. A note will do just as well."

"I shall not write. You can go home to-morrow, and I will follow the next day, if you do not care to stay in London."

"I shall not leave you behind me, Rosalie."

"Very well, then; you must stay till the day after to-morrow."

"But your uncle sent word by me that you were to come home at once."

"I shall not go to-morrow," I repeat obstinately; and aunt Rosa, knowing me of old, thinks it better not to press the point.

I must see my boy again. This is the idea uppermost in my mind. I cannot go away without seeing him; but how shall I manage it? I may not chance to meet him at the Rollestons' to-morrow; and, if not, shall I be forced to go away without bidding him good-bye? I knew this evening that our time together would not be long, but I did not dream that it would be so short as this.

"I hope you won't be very uncomfortable, aunt Rosa. You won't find the hair mattress as soft as your feather-bed at home."

"I don't expect to be comfortable. The whole place appears to me wretched and shabby to a degree."

"It is not at all wretched, I assure you. And I have improved greatly since I went to Madame Cronhelm's."

Aunt Rosa sniffs, sitting bolt upright in the most uncomfortable chair in the room.

"I think I will go to bed," she says. "That woman has quite tired me out."

I light her bed-room candle with alacrity, and precede her into the inner room. A little camp-bed has been put up for me in the dressing-room; but, before I go to bed, and after I have helped aunt Rosa to unpack her night-garments, I creep back to the dying fire in the drawing-room, and, sitting on the rug, lean my chin on my palms, and think of those two figures in that twilight window, and of a foolish promise made only to be broken. But if he comes to me, shall I not say "Yes"? If he keeps his share of the agreement, shall I not keep mine? A foolish happy smile curves my lips in the dying fire-light—the lips that he has kissed by the light of that great solitary evening-star. Yes, I will keep my promise, Gerard. But will you keep yours?

I go to Madame Cronhelm's in the morning, and after that to the Rollestons'. The Rollestons are sorry I am going away—Ada especially. Mr. Baxter is not at Berkeley Street, nor does any one mention his name. I come back to luncheon at Carleton Street, though the Rollestons try hard to keep me, and have just finished that long-delayed meal when Mary Anne comes in with a card in her grimy hand, which she proffers to me.

"Who is it?" aunt Rosa asks suspiciously.

"The gentleman up-stairs," Mary Anne answers, with malicious enjoyment in either squinting eye.

"Who?" aunt Rosa exclaims, letting her knitting fall into her lap in the extremity of her amazement.

"Ask Mr. Baxter to walk in," I say quietly. "Aunt Rosa, this is my friend Mr. Baxter. Mr. Baxter—Miss Herriek."

Gerard Baxter bows, aunt Rosa inclines her head stiffly, her eyes blazing through her spectacles like the eyes of her own cat Muff when he is vexed.

"I was sorry to hear that you were going away, Gerard Baxter says, as he sinks into a chair beside me.

"Yes," I answer, laughing. "My leave is stopped!"

Aunt Rosa is rather deaf. Unless we speak in a kind of raised, sustained tone, she can hear very little of what we say; and I do not think it necessary to do this—all the time.

"I had a great deal of assurance to venture to call on you, hadn't I?" Gerard says, smiling.

"I should have been sorry not to have wished you good-bye."

"Allie, may I write to you sometimes?"

"Oh, no; I think not!" I answer hurriedly. "I could not answer your letters."

"But how am I to live without either seeing or hearing from you?"

"You must work," I say, smiling a little; but there are tears in my eyes.

"I intend to work. I have been wild enough, Allie—you don't know how much of the Bohemian there is in me—but the thought of you will steady me, darling; while I love you I shall hate everything I know you would not like."

Something in the admission, frank as it is, saddens me. Is his love for me really great enough to work such a change in him as this? If he forgets me, will he not relapse into his old idle ways, and be so sorry, and so despair of ever doing any good?

"Gerard, will you promise to let me know the day that you forget me?"

"Forget you, Allie!"

"If you do forget me, promise to tell me so at once."

"I do promise; but that day will never come, darling. I have never loved any woman but you, Allie, and I never shall."

Aunt Rosa glowers upon us, speechless with wrath and indignation. What are we whispering about, the foreign-looking, shabby, unabashed young man and I? We make the conversation more general after this; and in about twenty minutes Gerard gets up to go.

"Good-bye!" he says, holding out his hand to me, having said good-bye to aunt Rosa. "It is hard that we can't have any better good-bye than this, Allie, isn't it?"

My eyes are full of foolish tears, so full that I am afraid they will flow over and attract aunt Rosa's attention. But aunt Rosa is not looking at me.

"Good-bye!" I echo mechanically.

And so he leaves me, and returns to his studio and, his unfinished pictures while I pack away a few tears into my portmanteau—the first I have shed since I was a child.

## CHAPTER VI.

"We'll, Allie, the more I look at you, the more I think you're the most extraordinary girl in the world!"

"Extraordinary, Olive?"

"To think you could have been satisfied with those wretched old rooms in Carleton Street when you had such a home as this!"

"I was very happy in Carleton Street, I answer dreamily.

"Happy! Because that boy was there."

"And I was not a bit obliged to your mother for bringing aunt Rosa down upon me."

"But mamma did not like your being here alone, Allie."

"What nonsense! I am my own mistress, Olive, and can do as I like."

"Not till to-morrow, my dear," Olive laughs. "After to-morrow, you can please yourself."

"And I mean to do it. I assure you."

We are walking from the vicarage to Woodhay—it is only a few minutes' walk through the wood. It is June weather—exquisite weather; all my woods are a mystic tangle of green leaf and shadow and golden-drooping sunshine, all my meadows are bloomy purple, "sighing for the scythe." Between Woodhay and the Vicarage there runs a little rushing brook, and beyond the brook, on my side of it, a hundred feet of woodland runs up steeply, with a wealth of overhanging ferns and tangled foliage throwing their shadow far across the shadowy combe. It is up this southern slope that we are winding by a steep path overhung with woodland tangle of woodbine and black-berry bramble, with a thousand tiny ferns and velvet mosses laughing at us from the crevices of every lichen-spotted rock.

"Do you ever think of that boy of yours, Allie?" Olive asks, as we climb the wooded steep together, bathed in alternate streaks of sun and shadow.

"Think of him?" I repeat inanely.

"You used to be great friends, you know, though I think you have forgotten him. Jack Rolleston used to chaff him about you—Jack thought he really cared awfully for you, Allie, joking apart."

"Jack Rolleston is a great fool, Olive!"

"Oh, well, I know Jack hasn't much sense! But you know that time Jack came down to Brighton for Poppy's wedding, he said Gerard Baxter was working himself into skin and bone, and had grown quite steady, and meant to make a name for himself."

"Yes, so you told me," I remark carelessly, though remembering all about it at least as well as Olive does.

"But he has fallen off since then," Olive says, shaking her blond head. "Poor fellow, I think he met with some disappointment about his picture—he was obliged to sell it or something, and they only gave him eighty for it, whereas Jack said he valued it at over a hundred, and it would not have been a penny too much."

A little sharp pain runs through my heart like a knife. This was what I had dreaded—this reaction after possible disappointment.

"I am sure you feel sorry for him, Allie," Olive says, looking at me.

"We used to call him your handsome sweetheart, you know—poor boy, he used to follow you about like your shadow!"

"You speak of him as if he were dead, Olive," I say a little sharply.

"I am afraid he is going to the bad, and that is worse," Olive observes sober-

ly. "I met Jack Rolleston the other evening, and he told me he hardly ever saw Gerard Baxter now, that he never came to Berkeley street, and that he was afraid he had got into a very wild set, and was going down hill as fast as he could."

Olive's preceding me up the steep path, and has enough to do to maintain her footing, without turning her head to look at me. I am glad of it. If she had looked at me, she must have noticed the exceeding whiteness of my face.

"It is a great pity, you know," she went on—Olive likes to hear herself talk.

"He is so young, and so remarkably good-looking! Katie Rolleston told me—you know she came down to Brighton the day before I left—that he passed her in Regent Street the other day, and it quite made her heart ache to see how shabby he was. She said she would have spoken to him, even in such a seedy coat; but he passed by without looking at her. I suppose he knew he was rather a disreputable-looking figure to be seen speaking to any lady in the street."

"Is he still lodging in Carleton Street?"

"I do not know. Jack knows very little about him. He says he doesn't like to seem as if he were prying into his affairs, and he is such a proud fellow, Jack says it would be as much as his life is worth to offer him a good luncheon at a restaurant and that he would be sure to guess it was because he looked half-starved."

"Does he look like that?" I ask infinitely distressed.

"Well, he looks very thin," Olive says, laughing a little. "I say, Allie, they are putting up triumphal arches here; did you know that?"

"I heard they intended doing it. We will come round by the garden, Olive. I don't want them to surround us like a swarm of bees."

Turning from the glimpse of the lawn and carriage-drive, seen between the stems of the walnut-trees, I open a little gate leading into a long straight walk walled by tall, green, fragrant hedges of box and yew.

"Don't you mean to let them see you, Allie?"

"Not to-day, if I can help it. I shall have enough and too much of that to-morrow."

"My dear you talk as if coming of age were a grievance!"

"It is a nuisance to me, Olive."

"You will tell me that Woodhay is a nuisance to you next!"

"Oh, no: I should not care to give up Woodhay!"

"I should think not!" Olive laughs, as we pass from the cool secluded green walk, through a tall archway cut in the hedge, and find ourselves in a blaze of sunshine and scarlet geranium, and brown velvet calceolaria, and blue lobelia, and a hundred other radiant blossoms.

"Allie, when are you coming to live here at Woodhay?"

"To live here?" I repeat absently, my eyes on the gilded weather-vane which twinkles like a star on the point of my quaint red-brick gable.

"You have done nothing but echo me since we left the Vicarage! When are you going to take up your abode here in your own manor of Woodhay?"

"I don't know. Not till uncle Tod is too old to do duty, probably. He will never leave the Vicarage till then."

"But can't you live here without your uncle Tod?"

"By myself, Olive?"

"You could get lots of nice elderly ladies to come and live with you."

"I think one would be enough!" I say, shrugging my shoulders.

"Of course I mean one—at a time. Why wouldn't your aunt Rosa come and live with you here?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## Who the Turkomans Are.

The Turkomans are a nomadic people occupying Armenia and the centre of Asia Minor, and our knowledge of them has recently been increased by the narrative of a Russian traveller, whose book is published in St. Petersburg.

Proverbs are a good index to the character of a nation, and that of the Turkomans, by the light of the following sayings, is certainly formidable:

"He who has seized the hilt of his sword does not wait for a pretext."

"A mounted Turkoman knows neither father nor mother."

"Where there is a town there are no wolves; where there are Turkomans there is no peace."

"No Persian crosses the Atreack, except with a rope round his neck."

"The Turkoman needs not the shade of trees nor the protection of laws."

It is needless to add that people with such proverbs are not always agreeable neighbors. The Turkomans have no towns worthy of the name. Even Merv, the Queen of the World, as it is called, is but a conglomeration of huts, and is more an agricultural district than what we are usually accustomed to call a town.

The inhabitants of these townless steppes live in carts, each cart containing a family, and lead a wandering life somewhat like that of our own gypsies, only incomparably more romantic. Their women are industrious, possess much more independence than Mohammedan women of other nations, and wear no veils. The men are not smart in appearance and their national costume does not approach the splendor of the Circassian dress, or even that of the Cossacks.

Read by a good light. The light should come from the side. Do not read when fatigued or when recovering from illness and do not read while lying down. Rest the eyes occasionally while using them. Read good print, and do not stoop while reading. Use proper glasses, avoid alcohol and tobacco, and take exercise in the open air.

## The World's Diamond Market.

The diamond mines of Brazil have long been exhausted and are now barely more than a myth. The mines of Brazil only furnish the world with diamonds of second quality, worth about \$250,000 per annum. As nearly every civilized woman even of ordinary means, has a diamond, and as it is the cherished ambition and determination of every other civilized woman who has no diamonds to obtain one before she dies, any details concerning the market which is satisfying female luxury will be of interest. Its location is at Kimberly, in South Africa, and how extensively this new town is engaged in supplying these glittering adornments for when it is known that in fifteen years it has exported diamonds in the rough to the value of \$200,000,000 which, with the cost of cutting, setting, and selling, represent \$500,000,000 taken from the pockets of consumers. To produce its annual crop the native population of Kimberly is paid over \$5,000,000 in wages.

A letter in the London Times from the diamond fields gives us some interesting particulars of the business. The discovery of these shining gems reminds one of the Indian in Brazil who first found one of them in the roots of a shrub he had pulled up and took home as a plaything for his children. A Boer girl in 1876 found the first diamond, also in the roots of a tree, and human nature having its weak side in that rude section of the world as well as in London, Paris, and New York, she adorned herself with it and made a sensation among the kraals of Boer society. It did not take long for the news to spread. The great grassy plains where the gem was found was soon covered with prospectors, armed with picks and spades, every man for himself. After the yellow surface soil had been exhausted a blue soil was found which was still richer in diamonds. This blue soil was observed to exist in large circular deposits, which geology soon defined as the remnants of mud volcanoes. A regular community began to centre about the locality, and the original landowners, private individuals, corporations, and even Governments commenced squabbling over the claims, which at last necessitated the organization of companies for mutual defence, and now the whole diamond area is worked by these companies with elaborate machinery.

## Soldiers of Fortune.

The key-note to the constitution of that group of devoted adherents who have come to be designated as the "Wolsley gang," writes Archibald Forbes in English Illustrated Magazine for May, I take to be its completeness for the functions which it has to perform as a composite whole. In each of its constituent elements its compounder,—if I may use the expression,—has discerned some specific attribute, of which, when the occasion calls it into requisition, he shall take as acute and purposeful avail. As a whole, then, it is totus, teres alque rotundus, an engine effectively adapted to a wide range of potential uses. The individual units of that whole do not strike one as by any means, one and all, men of exceptional general military ability. Some of them, indeed, may be called dull men. But never a one of them but has his speciality. One has a genius for prompt organization; another a rare faculty for administration. A third has a winning manner and a good address, a fourth is the scout of scouts. You may wonder what Wolsley can see in so-and-so that he has them always with him. Watch events long enough, and time will furnish you with the answer. This man, perhaps of no great account for ordinary purposes, has a strange gift, when there is doubt in regard to some line of action, of defining the right course in a single rugged, trenchant, pithy sentence that carries conviction; him, one may see, Wolsley keeps just to help him to make up his mind. This other man has seemingly no attribute at all, save inertness, a love for gazing on the wine when it is red, and the cultivation of strong language. But he too has his gift. Arrange for him a plan of attack, set every thing in order, tell him that all is ready, and that he may go to work. Then you can discern for what Wolsley has enrolled him in the gang. He draws his sword, he lets a roar out of him fit to wake the dead; he becomes a veritable gun of battle—a lambert thunderbolt of war; he radiates from him the mysterious, irresistible magnetism that inspires men to follow him, eye, to use the rough soldier phrase, "through hell and out at the farther side." The deed done, the conqueror wipes and sheathes his sword, mops his forehead, sighs for a big drink, and is conspicuous no more till he shall be wanted again.

## Running Down a Man-Eating Tiger.

A railway survey is being carried on through the North Cachar Hills in Assam and among other difficulties it encounters is the number of man-eating tigers which infest the district. A few weeks ago Mr. Lodder, the assistant engineer, was setting out through the jungle to work in the early morning with a party of nine men when a tiger suddenly sprang forward, seized one of the Goorkhas by the throat, and was off in an instant. Mr. Lodder, armed only with a hatchet, at once gave chase, three of his men joined him, and following along the trail, plainly marked by blood and bits of the man's clothes, they ran the beast so close that after a mile and a half he was compelled to drop his victim. What was left of the dead body was tied to a bamboo, and the little party pushed back with their burden. Every English sportsman shoots tigers now a days; but there are probably few now, like Mr. Lodder, have run a man-eating tiger down and robbed him of his prey.