

Her Great Love;

Or, A Struggle For a Heart

CHAPTER XIV. (Cont'd.)

He drew it away sharply, and his lips twitched, then—as she looked at him half startled by his sudden gesture—he slid his hand back and laid it on her arm.

"You forget all that you have done for me, Decima." He bit his lip. "I beg your pardon, Miss Deane! The name slipped out. I—I hear your brother a-calling you so—so often."

"But does it matter?" she asked, smiling at him innocently. "Why shouldn't you call me Decima, if you like? It is better than Miss Deane. And Decie is better still."

He looked at her steadily, his lips compressed. She was torturing him, and all so innocently!

"I'm afraid that—that it wouldn't be quite the thing," he said. "But—well, you must let me think of you as—the name seemed too dear, too sacred to be spoken—as Decie—sometimes."

As he walked up with them to the Woodbines—he gained another half hour with her by doing so—he gave some keys to Bobby.

"Use anything there as if it were your own," he said, in a casual way. "The woman cooks very fairly, and can manage a little dinner-party; it's more comfortable than dining at the club. You'll write to me for anything you want." And so on, and Bobby could only stammer his thanks.

Decima said not another word, but as he wished them good-bye, she gave him her hand and looked at him with all her grateful soul in her lovely eyes.

He took the look home with him—it haunted him as he sat, smoking endless pipes, in the chair she had bought for him. It followed him to his room, where, having dismissed Hobson, he stood with her ribbon in his hand.

"I am a fool!" he said. "I am living in a fool's paradise, and I shall wake presently to find myself in—the other place. I'll burn this. Yes; I'll burn it—and—try to forget her." He held the poor little ribbon to the candle—but drew it back with something like a moan on his lips. The ribbon slept on his heart that night—and every night; and his heart said to it: "I love her—I love her!" and the ribbon murmured back, "I know it."

CHAPTER XV.

In the morning he cursed his folly. Was this the way to forget her? To brood in the solitude of the great house over his secret love? After breakfast he came to a sudden resolution. He would go into society; he would meet the people he had avoided, see fresh faces, "divert his mind."

In the afternoon he had out his mail phaeton and pair and drove round paying calls. The Cattermoles, the Pethergills, and all the rest of them received him with great, and scarcely concealed joy. They thought him rather absent-minded and grim; but they were only too delighted to see him in any mood. He came back wearied to death, and in a very bad humor; and in a few days the usual invitations poured in. He accepted them one and all, and went the round of the dinner-parties and festivities which, all too palpably, had been got up in his honor. And he did his best to be agreeable, and, harder still, to be amused and "diverted."

There was a large family mostly girls—at the Cattermoles, and they were all mad over him. Gaunt was the sort of man to catch a girl's fancy. They raved about his good looks, his distinguished manners, his travels and adventures—his very grimness—for sometimes when he was more than usually bored, Gaunt was almost as grim as death—was voted an added charm; and his reputation for wildness—well, when women cease to be women, and only then, will the wickedness of man lose its fascination for them.

He kept away from The Woodbines, and avoided the village while he was going through his course of "diversion" and making the attempt to forget her. But instead of forgetting her, his mind dwelt on her day and night. She came upon him as he sat at a big dinner-party, and he would lay down his knife and fork and look straight before him with an expression of abstraction which not seldom startled the lady who sat beside him, and to whom, a few minutes before, he had seemed all attention.

He avoided Decima. But one day he met her coming through the village. He was riding along, his head bent gloomily, the dogs running silently at his heels—how quick the dogs are to understand and harmonize with their master's moods!—and he saw Decima coming toward him. She had a small basket on her arm, for she had been visiting some of her sick people.

As he raised his eyes, something shot through his heart—a dull, aching pain—for he thought she looked pale and sad. But her sweet face brightened as she saw him, and her eyes darkened with pleasure as he stopped and regarded her awkwardly and in silence, for the sight of her unnerved him.

"You have been in those cottages again. There is measles or something, isn't there?" he said, by way of greeting.

"Oh, yes; but I've had the measles long ago. And they're nearly over now, you know. But you haven't been into the village lately, have you?"

"No," he said, looking away from her. "I have been busy."

"I know," she said, quickly. "We have heard of your visiting and—dining out; and I am so glad."

"Glad! Why?" he asked, moodily.

"Oh, because it must be so pleasant for you," she said.

"Pleasant!" he said, grimly.

"Isn't it?" she said. "I think it must be to meet new and nice people. And it was so dull for you at the Hall—all alone, and seeing no one."

"It was not dull," he said, trying to speak more cheerfully; "and if you think that a course of dinner-parties is provocative of pleasure—Ah, well!" He looked round. "Is everything going on all right?" he asked, as he walked beside her.

Decima nodded brightly. She had been pale and sad a moment or two ago—he was sure of it. Was she pleased to see him?

"Oh, yes; we have gone on just as if you were here. Mr. Bright wanted to ask you about things; but I begged him not to worry you, but to let you go on enjoying yourself."

"Thanks!" he said, through his closed teeth. "That was very kind of you."

Enjoying himself!

"Yes, Mr. Bright agreed with me. He is so delighted at your going out so much."

"Oh, he is?"

"And did you hear from Bobby?"

"Yes," he said.

"He wrote me such a long letter. And he told me all about your rooms. They are beautiful, he says, only much too handsome and rich for him. And he is so proud of being a member of that fashionable club—and I was to try and thank you, because he never could. He says he is working hard, but having such a good time."

"I am pleased to hear it," he said. There was a silence.

His heart was beating with the joy of being near her, the delight of hearing her voice again. They reached the bridge which spanned the narrow, rippling river, and they stopped and leaned on the rail, looking at the stream.

"I am going to have a big dinner," he said. "I have to feed those who have fed me, not wisely but too well. I want you to come."

Decima shook her head and smiled. "Oh, I don't think so," she said. "Bobby's not here, you know, and father—and father would be lost in a big party. He never goes anywhere. No, I do not think I will come, thanks."

"I want you to," he said. "It will be the only thing that will make it tolerable." He paused. "The Mershons will come, I hope. You know them?"

"Oh, yes," she said unsuspiciously. "We see more of Mr. Mershon than ever. He is always at The Woodbines. Father and he are engaged in—well, I don't know what it is; but they spend a great deal of time poring over papers. And Mrs. Sherborne is often there. I have gone out driving with her several times. It has been rather dull lately. I suppose I miss Bobby," she added, innocently.

He glanced at her.

"Well, the dinner-party may amuse you," he said. "I hate the thought of it; I shall hate it worse if you will not come."

"I will come if you wish it so much, of course," she said, with a simplicity that smote him. "Oh, look at those water-lilies!" she exclaimed, pointing to a bunch floating near the edge of the water.

"I'll get you some," he said.

He went off the bridge and knelt on the bank, and slipped back his coat and shirt-sleeves from his left arm. Decima was watching him with a soft smile in her eyes. It was nice to have met him, to see and hear him—although he seemed so grim and stern. The day appeared to have grown brighter; and yet the sun had been shining, just as it was now, when she met him.

Suddenly, as he plunged his arm into the water and drew up the lilies by their long stems, she caught sight of some black marks or scars on the bare flesh.

"What are those marks on your arm?" she asked.

He was busy cutting the stems, and was off his guard for a moment.

"Oh, nothing," he said, pulling down his sleeve. "Cautic marks. I got a scratch from a young lion—there are the lilies. Let me put them in your basket."

She stood stock still, the blood rushing to her face and then away from it again, her eyes fixed on his face with a strange look in them. She remembered the Zoo and the young lion, the swift outstretching of his arm to save her, the sound of the rent cloth. The lion had torn his arm, then! For a moment something beat in his heart, a pulsation which almost deprived her of breath. She longed to take the arm and press her lips to the black marks; for he had got them in saving her. They should have been on her arm instead of his. Her eyes grew hot, and filled with tears, and the first thrill of love ran through her veins. Troubled, perplexed, fighting against this feeling with all a girl's instinctive dread of passion, she held out the basket; then, as soon as he had placed the lilies in it, she turned her head away.

"I must go!" he said. "It is late, and—Good-bye!" and she left him suddenly, her whole being quivering. He had not seen her face—he had been engaged with the lilies—and he suspected nothing of the emotions which had swept over her young heart.

That afternoon Bobby walked into the Orient—walked with the sense of proud possession which the young man feels in his first clue. He made his way through the imposing hall, with its solemn porter and stately footmen, into the handsome smoking-room, and lighting a cigarette, took up a paper; not to read, but as a screen from which he could look at the other members who were present; for Bobby was a stranger, and everyone who belonged to the Orient was of interest to him. He knew some by sight, or from their photographs displayed in the shop windows—for there are some famous men in the club—and he was wondering whether he should get to know any of them personally, when two men entered through the great glass doors.

Bobby looked at them curiously. One was a tall, fair, very fair man, with a clean-shaven face, frank-looking blue eyes, and lips wearing a peculiarly pleasant and winning smile. The other was a younger man—of Bobby's age—with red hair and a pale face. He was plain, but there was something of suppressed force in the rather sullen-looking face which was noticeable. His eyes were somewhat bloodshot, and, as he looked from side to side, they had a suggestion of ferocity, of savagery held in check by their owner which made them still more remarkable.

Bobby took a second glance at him; then, with an exclamation, rose to his feet. For he had suddenly recognized the young man as a fellow school-fellow.

"Halloo, Trevor!" he said, holding out his hand.

The young fellow eyed him with a frown for a moment, then he said, without any great display of joy:

"Halloo, Deane! Didn't know you were in town?"

"No," said Bobby in his bright way. "It's a long time since we met."

"Not since we left that beastly Rugby," said Trevor, gloomily. "Are you staying up for any time?"

"For a month or two," said Bobby.

The fair man stood looking at them with a pleasant smile in his blue eyes and on his well-cut lips.

"A meeting of old friends, Trevor?" he said in a soft musical voice. "Will you introduce me, my dear fellow?"

Trevor glowered for a moment at the thick Turkey carpet as if he had a grudge against it; then he said, sullenly:

"It's an old school-fellow of mine, Mr. Deane. This is a friend, Deane—Mr. Thorpe, Morgan Thorpe."

Mr. Morgan Thorpe held out his hand with a winning smile.

"Delighted to know any friends of Trevor's," he said. "And very glad to find you are a member of the old club, Mr. Deane."

There was something flattering in the speech and its manner which made Bobby flush with pleasure.

"And what are you doing—just on a pleasant visit to the little village?" asked Mr. Thorpe. "Shall we sit down, Trevor? Mr. Deane, will you join us in a drink?"

Bobby said he would have coffee, and it was brought in by a company with the soda and whiskeys of the other men.

"I'm grinding for Sandhurst," said Bobby.

"Ah, I envy you!" said Mr. Thorpe in the same flattering way. "Nothing like the service. I was in it for some years."

"What regiment?" asked Bobby, who of course knew his Army List by heart.

"Not an English one, alas!" said Mr. Thorpe, blandly. "I was in foreign service. A free lance, Mr. Deane, a free lance. I have my brevet colonelcy—but of course I don't use it here. I am a civilian in England, but over there—"

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. Bobby would have asked where "over there" was, but didn't like to.

"Deane—Deane? Let me see, are you one of the Deanes of Leamington?" continued Mr. Thorpe.

"No," said Bobby; "I live at a place called Leafmore."

"Ah, I know the Deanes of Leamington very well, Leafmore?" He shot a swift glance from his blue eyes at Bobby.

"Leafmore in Downshire? I've heard of it. Now, what shall we do? What do you say to a game of pool?"

Bobby had to confess that he didn't know billiards.

"Never too late to learn, my dear fellow!" said Mr. Thorpe. "I'm a deuced bad player myself or I'd teach you; but Trevor is a first-class performer with the stick and the sphere. Come on, Trevor, and give us both a lesson."

Trevor got up with a kind of reluctance, and they went into the billiard-room. Trevor and Thorpe played, and Bobby took his first lesson in marking. Thorpe played, as he said, indifferently; and appeared to take more interest in chatting with Bobby than in the game. He talked—well, Bobby thought he had never met a more charming man, or one more frank and candid, and really, almost child-like—in his general simplicity. In the course of an hour Bobby felt as if he had known Mr. Morgan Thorpe for years. Trevor said little, but played with a kind of moody absorption, and made some splendid breaks.

Presently Mr. Morgan Thorpe glanced at his watch.

"I say! time—time! Dear me, how quickly it has flown. That's thanks to you, Deane. He had dropped the 'Mr.' already, which was really very friendly of him. 'We must be going, Trevor. We dine early, you know. Oh, by the way, Deane, I wonder whether I could persuade you to waive ceremony and come and dine with us—I mean my sister and myself—and Trevor of course. We shall be quite en famille, you know, and I can assure you that my sister will be very pleased to see you. A friend of our dear Trevor has the surest passport—eh, Trevor?"

Trevor did not respond with a smile to the smile, but glanced at Bobby, and then sullenly made a red hazard.

"Thank you," said Bobby. "I shall be very pleased."

"Now, that's very good of you," said Mr. Morgan Thorpe, gratefully. "We dine at seven-thirty. Early, isn't it? But you won't mind just once in a way. My sister—well, my sister is rather delicate, and goes to bed early. Seven-thirty. How stupid of me! I had forgotten the address."

He took a card from his case and gave it to Bobby, with a charming smile. The card bore this inscription:

"Mr. Morgan Thorpe,
31 Cardigan Terrace, S.W."

Bobby put the card in his pocket, said he would be punctual, and the two men left the club.

When they got outside, Trevor said, gloomily:

"Why the devil did you ask him to dinner? It wasn't necessary. I don't know much of him—an old school-fellow."

Morgan Thorpe smiled.

"My dear fellow, that's no reason why you shouldn't know more of him. I've taken a fancy to him—have indeed. Besides, he will be a pleasant addition to our petite party."

Mr. Thorpe hummed a bright little air, and Trevor muttered something under his breath. They walked to Cardigan Terrace, and Thorpe stopped outside No. 31.

"No use asking you to come in, I suppose?" he said, blandly.

Trevor looked with a kind of savage wistfulness, up at the windows, then shook his head.

"No, I shall be there at seven-thirty," he said, then, dear boy," said Thorpe; and he went up the steps and rang the bell.

The door was opened by a maid-servant, a middle-aged woman with the unmistakable face and manner of a French woman.

(To be continued.)

"A woman," says an observer of the sex, "has as much excitement in getting her fortune told as a man has in making his."



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The knapper of Ely, says Harper's Weekly, finds his material ready to hand in the extensive strata of flint lying amid the chalk beneath the surface. Shafts are sunk direct to the floorstone, and from these burrows are made into the chalk. This mining is all done in the most primitive fashion, as the men, for the most part, work singly, without fear of syndicates or corners. Each has his own claim, his own workshop. Quite often, though, he employs help in getting his wares ready for market.

The claim is about a man's length and three feet wide. Generally he digs down about 35 feet, and thence in a horizontal or slanting line, as best suits his purpose. His pick is shaped like a figure seven, and he goes down the shaft by toeholes, ascending by the same means. His workshop, like his mining, is also primitive, being a rude, cheap shed in his garden, the only fittings of which are a block of oak tree trunk, rather smaller than a butcher's block, a seat, a little stove to dry the flint, pails and some old tin cans.

It might be supposed that flintlocks went out of use about the close of the Revolutionary War, but these knappers still find the steadiest and most important branch of their industry the supplying of flints for this old-fashioned firearm.

Where do these relics of bygone days go? To make muskets for the negroes in Africa. Some are shipped to South America and China. As yet there has been no decline in the demand. Another odd shipment was made during the Boer War, when 14,000 tinder flints were sent to British troops so that they

could get light when wet ruined the matches.

"Remains of the Neolithic age," now to be found in many museums and private collections, were manufactured by this little community in England. They consider their business entirely legitimate, and in a way it is, for it is the shrewd, unscrupulous middleman who sells for a goodly price these valuable antiques to the innocent. A great many schools and public educational institutions are supplied by these knappers, and, whether the objects are known to be imitations or not, they are much more valuable than diagrams or illustrations in the teaching of history and geology.

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