

LORD HUNTLEIGH

OR A

MODERN NEMESIS

(By Margaret Kelly)

CHAPTER XIV.

Dollie was no longer to be seen in the wards of the hospital. She had finally put off her becoming uniform, much to the regret of the medical staff and her fellow-nurses, who heart good wishes for her future, however, still cling in her ears and made for her the most tender and touching music.

She had gone to Rochampton to stay with Mr. Clive's sister for the time before her marriage, which was to take place with as little delay as possible. Mrs. Eversley had not been pleased to hear of her brother's intentions.

"What do you think of this, Henry?" she asked, handing her husband the letter in which her brother had made the first intimation of his engagement. "Poor Ossy has succumbed at last to some fair charmer. I am anxious to see the sort of woman that has succeeded in captivating him. The last time we teased him, do you remember, he said he should marry when he met some one who had the charms of Mary Anderson."

Captain Eversley read the letter, then stroked his military moustache and smiled.

"He wants you to act as chaperone to his girl, so your wish will soon be gratified. He does not mean to lose any time, evidently."

"Oh, but it is so like Ossy! The girl seems to have no parents, or he wouldn't have wished her to be married from our place. She is some friendless creature that he thinks it his duty to protect, you may be sure. He has such strange notions. I am sure she is a designing little puss. I wish he had asked my advice before taking such a decisive step as engaging himself."

"Men are accustomed to do that sort of thing, aren't they?" replied the Captain, with good-humored irony. "One always asks one's sister's advice as to matrimonial adventures, is it not so?"

"But most men are not a bit like Ossy. He is such a dear fellow, and not a bit able to protect himself from the dreadful women who are determined to marry him," returned Mrs. Eversley, who was a tiny, pretty little woman, looking as though she were made to be petted and made much of all her life.

The Captain was a fine, well-proportioned, well-grown man, with a good-humored expression on his otherwise ordinary features and a soldier-like bearing in all his movements.

"I think," he said, with a twinkle in his blue eyes, "that the dear boy has protected himself extremely well so far, and you may be sure that he has not done anything rash. As for marrying in order to constitute himself protector to some poor torn maiden, I fear the days of such chivalry are past. Depend upon it, this Miss Brownedge is a person worth having. Osborne has a discriminating eye."

"Well, I hope so. I should like him to be happy. I suppose I must write and say we shall have great pleasure in receiving Miss Brownedge." Mrs. Eversley wrote, and the consequence was that her brother and his future bride came two days later, the latter to take up her residence for a short time at "the Homelands."

Poor little Mrs. Eversley was quite overwhelmed by the surprising beauty of quiet dignity of her brother's fiancée, and capitulated at once without any preliminary siege. Captain Eversley, too, thought that his brother-in-law had been especially discriminating this time, and the Eversley children declared that Miss Brownedge was far and away the most delightful person who had as yet entered into their young lives.

The next day, when the surgeon had gone to the hospital and Dollie was charming the children, who had begged to have her all to themselves for just one half-hour, Captain and Mrs. Eversley were discussing their guest and future relative.

"If she was not so sweet I should be quite afraid of her. Do you know, I could scarcely realize that it was she at the station yesterday."

"I suppose you were looking out for a girl with an orphan-like appearance, eh? The regulation blue serge frock and a black sailor hat," laughed the Captain.

"Don't be absurd, Henry! But really, I was not at all prepared for such a princess. I feel quite small and insignificant, and the house does not seem at all up to the mark, somehow. Does she make you feel like that?" Mrs. Eversley inquired nervously.

"Oh, dear no," answered her husband. "But then my preconceived notions of her were not as definite as yours. I had not imagined her to be a poor forlorn orphan, nor did I go to the other extreme of imagining her to be an impudent husband-seeker. Women are so hasty—and then, of course, they get so dreadfully taken in."

"She is a lovely creature, at all events. It is such a relief to think that Ossy has been so fortunate in his choice. He thinks she is quite too perfect, and says she is really as good as she is beautiful."

"I am glad you are pleased, and I only hope that after ten years Osborne will have as much reason to congratulate himself on his wife as I have on my Nell."

Mrs. Eversley blushed, looking very young and pretty. She was as pleased as any girl might have been at receiving a first compliment from the man she loved.

"Ah, Henry, you have not forgotten yet how to say pretty things. I am afraid that Ossy has not that gift," she said.

"How do we know what being in love will do for him?" asked Captain Eversley. "He may even, like that character of Dickens', 'drop into poetry.'"

"I hope not. That would be too awful to contemplate. But I mustn't waste any more time in idle gossip. I have promised to take Miss Brownedge (I can't call her Dollie—it is too absurd for such a queenly creature) up to town to do some shopping. You might drive us down to Hammersmith, and we can get a train there. I won't ask you to take us all the way into town, as we shall be busy all day."

Dollie felt that she had never spent such a pleasant day. She was too much of the true woman not to love pretty things, whether of dress or furniture, and her artistic sense was charmed by the sight of so much of the beautiful merchandise of the wealthiest city in the world.

Then Mr. Clive dropped in to lunch with them in Regent street, for his house in Wimpole street was in process of being turned inside out by painters and decorators.

"Do you mind my leaving you for an hour?" asked Mrs. Eversley with a smile when they rose from the table. "Do you think you could manage to entertain Miss Brownedge for a little while? I should like to call on Mrs. William Eversley if you can spare me for a time. I shan't stay if you have any engagements, Osborne. But if not—"

"Go, by all means. I am free for a couple of hours now. Where shall we see you?"

Having appointed a meeting place, Mrs. Eversley tripped away, and Osborne took this first opportunity of asking Dollie what she thought of his sister.

"I like her very much—and she seems so very happy. I shall be very fond of them all by-and-by."

"Yes, Eversley is a good fellow, and the children are jolly little fellows, aren't they?"

"They are charming," answered Dollie, and then the thought of her own boy came and cast the only shadow that had fallen across her happiness.

Osborne Clive seemed to respond to her thoughts, for he said suddenly: "By the way, I shall never rest till we get your little fellow from Mrs. Clifton. She would not be so cruel as to wish to keep him. It is rather unfortunate business, though, she has become so very much attached to him. However, we must make every effort, even though it should come a little hard on her."

Dollie's eyes looked their gratitude, but for the moment she could find no words in which to express it.

"You make me too happy, Osborne," she said at length. "I can never be grateful enough to you."

"There is no question of gratitude," replied Mr. Clive. "Let it be only love between us."

"You have my love," she answered, simply. "But don't you think love is made up of many parts, and that gratitude might be one of them?"

"Perhaps you are right—I don't think I have very analyzed it. I am afraid I am totally ignorant of the theory of love, and am content to remain so."

It must be confessed that the great surgeon's ignorance seemed so blissful that one could not have found the heart to trust wisdom upon him if it would have subtracted one iota from the sum of his happiness.

Dollie too was happy now. Often she had vainly regretted having given up her boy so readily, as it seemed to her. Why had she not kept him and struggled to make a way for him and for herself? It was easy to question why, but the answer that came and showed her those past days in all their utter dreariness acquitted her of any but a wish for her son's future welfare.

Now all her troubles had come to an end, and her only feeling was that this perfect joy could not last. She was in a state of feverish consciousness, accompanied by a sensation that she was living in a dream out of which she would surely awake and find herself plunged into some new phase of a sad experience.

"You don't look very bright. What are you thinking about?" Osborne Clive asked, softly breaking in upon her reverie.

"I was thinking that I am not used to being so happy, and I am afraid it cannot last. If I were to be always as happy as I am now, I think I should not have the very faintest desire for Heaven—and it won't do to prefer earth to Heaven."

"So you are looking for a little something disagreeable to season

your happiness with. My dear little girl, you have had your share of that in the past, and you will be sure to have more in the future, only don't run to meet it half-way, it will find you out, depend upon it, without so much exertion on your part. I did not know before what an ascetic little wife I was to have."

"Oh, no, I am altogether too selfish to want to go in for asceticism. It is nothing but selfishness that makes me feel like this. After all, I have been loaded with happiness in the past compared with any some of your poor patients. I shall disgust you when you find out how little I care for and that will be something disagreeable for me in earnest."

"I am glad you are giving us some idea of what the future unhappiness is to consist of, I shall be able to act accordingly."

"It would cause me the greatest distress to knowingly disgust or pain you. I am so stupidly sensitive over anyone I love. It would hurt me beyond measure to think that I deserved a cross look or an unkind word. But I suppose I shall, some day. I hope it won't be for a long, long time."

"Never, as far as I am concerned," said Mr. Clive, fervently.

"Do you know, Henry," said Mrs. Eversley that evening, upon her return. "I have often heard of the twilight that shines in people's eyes, but this afternoon after she had left Ossy I really saw it in Dollie. It is quite a love match, one can see I am so glad. They say there is so little of that sort of thing in the world nowadays, and I do despise a person who would marry for money or position."

The captain laughed. "I declare, Nell," he said, "you are getting quite romantic and sentimental. Money is, to be sure, a great factor in most of the marriages we hear of. But what can one do? If a fellow only has enough to live on he is bound either to marry for money, or, if he marries without it, he only drags himself and his wife—"

"I don't mean in that case. The best thing a man can do then is to leave matrimony alone altogether," interrupted Mrs. Eversley.

"Oh, Nell, you didn't think so ten years ago, did you? Isn't it possible to find love and money together sometimes?"

"Sometimes, I suppose," Nell admitted, for Captain Eversley had had nothing but his pay as lieutenant when he married the well-dowered Miss Clive.

"Well, having got you to admit that, I will not continue the discussion. Come and play me something nice. Miss Brownedge is very fond of music, so she will enjoy it as much as I shall."

CHAPTER XV.

On arriving in London Alaric, finding that his wife had gone to Park Lane, followed her thither. He was comparatively affluent at present, the result of his play at Monte Carlo, and, being affluent, his insolence was also at a high pitch. If his wife had made any awkward disclosures to her parents, he was resolved to brave it out. What did he care for them or her?

"She little dreams in her haughty, vixenish heart, how I could humble her in the dust," he muttered between his white teeth, and then resuming his smile, he went on, "but such a course would be too hard on myself. I must keep that secret at all hazards."

He was not surprised to find the Margraves somewhat cold and distant in their manner towards him. They asked him to stay for dinner, which he did, nothing loth, expecting to get over an uncomfortable meeting with Sybil thus easily. He met her crossing the hall, and confessed to himself that he beauty was peerless, enhanced as it was by the becoming folds, and tint of a turquoise blue velvet gown that hung from her white, rounded shoulders, with a wondrous grace.

Alaric was enchanted to see his wife looking so exquisitely lovely; putting love aside, it was impossible not to admire her. So with something of his former charm and grace of manner, he went towards her, and would have kissed her.

"I have come back, Sybil. Will you not welcome me?"

She stood back and surveyed him as though he had been the most complete stranger—and an insolent one as well.

"Why should I welcome you?" she asked, with cold scorn and a gesture of infinite disdain. "You can be nothing to me henceforward. You are a guest of my father at present, but you are nothing—less than no thing—if it were possible—to me."

She passed on.

A thousand evil spirits leapt into Alaric's heart. He set his teeth with a cruel snap, and his face became deadly pale. His first impulse was to fall her to the ground—and he refrained not from any manly afterthought—but because Alaric Huntleigh feared the consequences for himself.

She went into the drawing-room, and he waited for a few moments to collect his senses and to recover from the blow which his pride had received. Then he followed her, and took part in entertaining several guests who were strangers to him.

At dinner that evening he surpassed himself by his brilliant and interesting conversation. Mrs. Margrave softened very considerably towards him before they rose from the table, and began to assure herself that probably

the cause of her child's estrangement resulted from faults on both sides. Mr. Margrave had no desire to condemn his son-in-law unreservedly, and was of opinion that "Sybil must not be allowed to wreck her happiness in the way she wished. This little quarrel must be smoothed over, or patched up, somehow. Sybil did not know how to manage this high-spirited young fellow, it was plain."

So after the guests had gone Mr. Margrave, with all the tact he could command, began his self-imposed task of reconciliation.

But he had reckoned without his host, and ended by declaring that it was a hopeless affair. Knowing Sybil's forgiving nature, they were equally astonished at her firmness in abiding by her first decision, and at the calm contempt with which she listened to Alaric's pleadings and urgings.

Mrs. Margrave retired in tears after the first few minutes, and then at last Mr. Margrave himself began to despair of his influence having any effect. He also felt that it was impossible to do any more at present. It was certainly a great fiasco.

It grieved him greatly to see this great "rifle in the lute," but so adroit and diplomatic had Alaric been that he could not fathom the depths of that young man's character, and was inclined to throw a good half of the blame on poor Sybil's shoulders.

Sybil herself was astonished when she found out how small a list of chargeable offences she could make out against Alaric. And many of these which had seemed dire in the extreme, he laughed away, until she felt that she must appear foolish in comparison with him. Yet she knew his baseness and the depth of his deceit.

The instinct which she had despised in Felix, was now strong in her own soul, so she steeled her heart against him. He had felt from the first that nothing was to be hoped for from her, and each rebuff that he met with increased him more and more, until—though in outward appearance cool and self-contained—he was in a white heat of passion.

It was late when the unsuccessful ordeal was over, and so Alaric remained at Park Lane that night. He slept little, and when he did sleep his slumber was disturbed by dreams in which Sybil appeared to torment and harass him. When he rose, it was with a plan of revenge, the contemplation of which caused him an ocean of satisfaction, though its execution would put him for ever beyond the pale of society. Whilst dressing, his resolution was made. He would leave London that day after a last interview with Sybil. He could easily realize all his effects, and Matabeleland was a splendid field for adventure and enjoyment. He would join the Chartered Forces; he knew men who had already done so, and who would give him a hearty welcome.

He breakfasted alone, calmly and quietly, with the smile on his lips at

intervals. He saw Mr. Margrave's horse brought round, and knew that Mrs. Margrave had made an appointment in Portland Place for eleven o'clock. He waited until that time, and then sent a note to Lady Huntleigh to say that he would like to see her for a few minutes, as he was about to leave England that day. She came down to the morning-room looking pale, but still beautiful.

"Won't you sit down?" Alaric said, drawing up a chair, with the frozen smile about his mouth. Sybil saw the smile and a sudden terror took possession of her. She was afraid she knew not what, and felt hysterically inclined to scream. Alaric knew that she was frightened, and it was a real pleasure to him to prolong the agony as long as possible. He was like a cat, playing with the poor little mouse before he gave it the final blow.

Sybil sat down. Alaric continued standing.

"I shall leave England to-day," he said. "But I could not go without saying good-bye to you, my darling."

He spoke with exaggerated emphasis. Sybil looked up quickly, and the hot blood surged into her cheeks.

"Have you brought me here to insult me?" she asked, rising. "Have you no manliness left, Lord Huntleigh?"

"Sit down, he said, placing his hand heavily upon her shoulder and pushing her back into the chair. "I want you to listen to me." His eyes gleamed and his cruel teeth shone white—his look was savage, scorching, and Sybil recoiled from him with horror. "Yes," he continued, noticing the almost involuntary movement, "draw yourself away from me. Show a little more of your infernal pride, but remember that pride always has a fall, and yours is no exception to the rule. I am going to tell you now what I should never have told you if you had treated me with anything like consideration. You are not my wife. You are not Lady Huntleigh. You are only Sybil Margrave. I am already married and there is an heir to the earldom of Huntleigh, though no one knows it. You can spread abroad the news if you like, or if you wish to keep the secret to yourself it will be something pleasant to meditate upon in my absence."

Sybil stood up without hindrance this time.

"You are mad—you must be mad. None but a madman would take a pleasure in inventing such vile falsehoods, even to revenge himself upon—"

"Falsehoods!" laughed Alaric. "It is as true as there is—"

"Don't—don't!" Sybil covered her face with her hands. Then she looked at him, and a wave of pity swayed over her. With a sudden impulse she threw her arms around his neck.

"Dear Alaric, don't say such wild things. I will love you, I will do whatever you like, I will go back to our house. You are over-tired—you want to rest. Let me ring for something for you—only don't say such

foolish things—you will kill me with love," Lord Huntleigh asserted, his face pale with excitement, and undressing the arms from his neck, he pushed Sybil away. "I am not mad—it would do well for you if I were. I am sane enough in all conscience. If you want a further proof—look here."

The trembling Sybil drew near and saw a marriage certificate, but that was all. Before she could distinguish the names written upon it her head swam and a sudden faintness overpowered her. But the very intensity of the shock she had received prevented her from fainting. She took hold of the table to steady herself, and presently the mist passed from her eyes. She could not "see," she could not move, her throat swelled, her tongue was parched—in her face was sufficient agony to have satisfied the most rapacious of human vultures.

Alaric spoke again as he folded up the paper and put it back in his pocket book.

"I swore last night to be revenged on you—I have kept my oath—farewell, Sybil Margrave—revenge is sweet."

He was gone.

Sybil sank upon the lounge close at hand—a motionless heap. She pressed her hands tightly over her burning forehead feeling that her very brain was on fire.

How long she remained thus she knew not. She was dimly conscious that after a time some commotion was taking place without, and then someone burst into the room. It was her mother.

"You have heard all," she exclaimed, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, my darling child, my darling Sybil! I am so grieved. It is all so shocking, he is dead. Don't give way, dearest, if you had only—"

But she said no more, for Sybil lay white and rigid. She was mercifully unconscious.

It was the day before Dollie's marriage with Osborne Clive was to take place. She had been strangely nervous and excited for several days, and not at all her own, calm, self-possessed self.

"Are there such things as presentiments, Osborne?" she had asked. "I have a conviction that something dreadful will happen before to-morrow. Be careful of yourself, dear."

(To be continued.)

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That was a fine extravagant company that recently toured a portion of the United States in its German-American play of the "Prince and the Pauper." The audiences were large and the enthusiasm immense. All the millionaires alighted themselves, and the consumption of "white label" wet goods was enormous. The "working classes" carried the torches and otherwise behaved themselves. No matter! Thus are the capitalists of the two countries once more united. The unification of "capital" and "labor" is not in it with this latest movement of the exploiting classes. Now will you be good, or go away back and sit down?

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