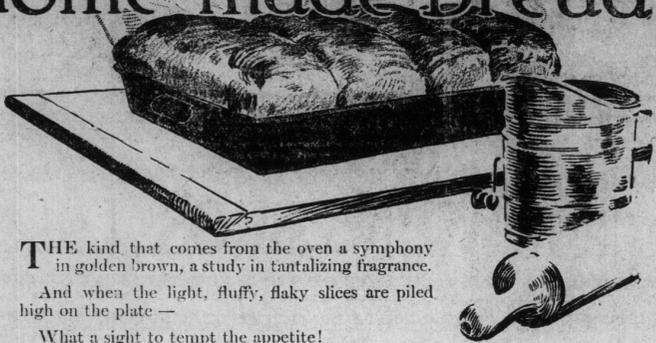


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# Beautiful Cynthia;

## Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER XXXIII.  
THE REPENTANT SINNER.

"No; nothing that you have not heard," said Cynthia, with a sigh, "but—"

Lady Alicia shook her head. "It is only a hope, an idea?"

"A conviction," said Cynthia, solemnly.

Lady Alicia stared at her, then she shook her head.

"There is no hope," she said, in a hollow voice. "He is dead. And my heart, all that to me is worth living for, died with him. I meant to keep from you the knowledge of the part I played; but—but I have been ill; I was half mad for a time, and Northam's letter worked on me. I felt that, if I were to have any peace, I must come and tell you, Cynthia. You will think hardly of me, won't you understand?"

Cynthia leaned forward, her eyes moist, her breath coming painfully.

"Ah, but I do, I do!" she said, with sad earnestness. "You acted wickedly, selfishly; but—but—oh, do you think I do not know, I who love him, how greatly you were tempted? To lose Darrel! To see a chance of winning him— Oh, I understand. I understand!"

Lady Alicia stared at her. "Then you—forgive me, Cynthia!" she faltered.

"Yes; forgive and—pity!" responded

ed Cynthia gravely, her eyes dwelling pityingly on the white face, the twitching lips.

Lady Alicia arose. "You—you are a good woman, Cynthia; I had almost said a saint," she murmured brokenly. "Another woman, hearing of what I had done, would have cursed me."

Cynthia shuddered and held up her hand.

"Don't!" she breathed. "I have no bitterness in my heart. There is no room for that," she added, with simple pathos. "It is too full of him. I know that he is not dead. I am going to find him."

Lady Alicia's self-possession broke up, and the tears welled slowly to her eyes.

"God help you; help us both, Cynthia," she said, in a low voice. "You have still more to suffer; for—"

"You will not accept the dreadful truth. It will be all the harder to bear when it is forced on you. I will go now. I—I am glad I came, though you will never know the effort it cost me to face you, to confess."

She stood for a moment, looking at Cynthia; then she turned away; but Cynthia rose and laid her hand on her arm.

"When I said 'forgive,' I meant that I forgave you fully," she said, in a low voice. "You asked God to help you. If I did not believe that He will—ah, but I must keep on hoping. I must, I must! Good-by, Lady Alicia."

Summoning all her strength of will, she drew her fellow sinner toward her and kissed her. Lady Alicia quivered in every limb, then suddenly her head dropped on Cynthia's bosom, and the two women held each other in a mutual embrace; then Lady Alicia drew herself from Cynthia's arms, made her way to the door, and passed out—passed out of Cynthia's life for many years.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.  
THE SALE.

On his way to the sale the next morning, Northam called at the cot-

lege to inquire after Cynthia, and heard that she was better; that, indeed, she was dressed and downstairs. But he did not go in; for the sight of her tearless misery and, worse, the baseless hope, as he considered it, which alleviated that misery, were too hard for him to bear.

As he drew near to the entrance to

the Court, he saw that the sale had attracted a large number of people, who were strolling about the drive or clattering over the house.

The hall in which the sale was to take place was crowded, and a murmur of excited talking and laughing rose like the hum of a hive of bees.

His entrance, of course, attracted considerable attention, and Northam took to a corner of the hall and leaned against the wall, his face and manner as impassive as usual; so listless and uninterested, in fact, that the other spectators concluded that he had come to look on merely.

Presently he saw Mr. Burridge and Sampson, accompanied by the auctioneer, come from the library.

Old Burridge's face wore its usual childlike expression; his thick lips hung loosely, and his eyes regarded the crowd, which stared back at him with interest, as if he wondered why they had all come.

Sampson, on the other hand, was undignifiedly elevated; he had a half-smoked cigar in his lips, and he bestowed an arrogant, condescending nod here and there, as he pushed his way through the crowd toward a chair at the table below the auctioneer's rostrum. He suddenly caught sight of Lord Northam in his comparatively quiet corner.

Mr. Sampson's never at any time pleasing countenance was rendered still more unprepossessing by a scowl. But presently, forcing a smile he turned and thrust his way to Northam's side.

"Mornin', my lord," he said, with a mixture of covert insolence and servility which made Northam's big toe itch. "Glad to see you, of course; but I'm afraid if you thought of picking up a bargain or two you'll be disappointed."

"As how, Mr. Burridge?" asked Northam, with his impassive drawl; but with a certain something in his look which drove the insolence from Sampson's manner and voice as he answered:

"Well, you see, the conditions of the sale have been altered, my lord. The auctioneer—a first-rate man, my lord, one of the best—and my father, who is the mortgagee, have decided to offer the whole thing in two lots;

the estate first, and the furniture and effects in a second lot; the purchaser of the first to take the second by the usual valuation, if he cares to do so. You see, the person who buys the house and estate may like to purchase the furniture and the rest of it—to take the whole show, you know."

"I see," said Northam. "A very good arrangement, Mr. Burridge." "Glad you think so, my lord," said Sampson, his insolence coming back to him. "Hope you'll make a good bid for the whole thing. 'Fraid we shall come out badly, however, high the bidding goes. Real estate is ruling low on the market just now. In fact, properties are going for next to nothing. And I'm afraid we shall be left with the rickety old place on our hands, worse luck!"

"Yes? Wish you all the luck—you deserve, Mr. Burridge," said Northam, in an utterly expressionless voice.

Sampson glanced at him with his small, shifty eyes, forced a smile, and pushed his way back to the table. The auctioneer, a keen, hawk-faced man repped with his hammer for silence, and opened the sale with a very curt and brief eulogium of the property.

"No need for me to say more, gentlemen," he said, in a pertentious fashion. "You all know the Court—it's well known as one of the grandest and most beautiful estates in England; fine ancestral mansion standing in extensive and grandly wooded grounds, with several good farms attached, and all let to responsible tenants. Late the property of Sir Anson Frayne, deceased; and to be sold at the instance of the mortgagee. I shall offer the estate in one lot, and give the purchaser the option of taking the second lot at valuation."

Murmurs rose, for many persons had come, some from London, in the hope of buying portions of the furniture of the pictures, and so on; but the auctioneer used his hammer again and silenced the complainers.

"Now for Lot one," he said, his harsh, strident voice echoing through the grim old hall. "I'll take a bid for Lot one. You will know about what it's worth, though, to speak frankly,

times are bad. Give us a bid, please."

Silence. "Is it cautiousness or shyness? No one ventures? Then I'll open the ball."

He named a sum which represented about a quarter of the value; but no one bettered the bid for some moments, and the hammer was going down when Northam nodded. The auctioneer looked surprised, but instantly called out the sum. Old Bur-

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ridge just raised his eyes, and the auctioneer raised the amount by a hundred pounds; Northam nodded again. The people craned their necks to get a sight of the man who possessed the temerity to bid against Mr. Burridge, but were puzzled; for Northam's face was like that of one

carved from wood.

Mr. Burridge raised his eyes again, and continued to raise them, as Northam persistently bid against them. Burridge was as calm as a block of ice, but Mr. Sampson was getting hot and restless, and he bent his head and whispered in his father's huge ear:

"What's his name? Is he going to outbid us? What?"

Old Burridge's thick lips moved slowly.

"Keep quiet," he muttered, as he nodded again.

Northam's higher bid promptly followed; the bidding rose quickly but steadily; half the value was reached; the sum increased, nearly the whole value had been bid by Northam. For the first time Burridge glanced in the direction of his opponent; and the old man's eyes were bland and childlike no longer. The spectators of the duel were growing more excited at every bid.

"Dear me, if old Burridge ain't met his match!" muttered an old farmer, one of the old servants of the Court; and his wrinkled face grew still more wrinkled by the grin of hope. "I'd give my best cow, aye, that I would, to see him bested!"

"Not he!" retorted a fellow servant who stood beside him. "He won't let the old place be snatched from his claws. 'Tother chap—he's a fine gentleman, as all can see—will give in 'fore Burridge. The old devil won't lose his hold of the Court. We all do know that he's set his heart on it, he and Master Sampson; dang 'em both!"

The auctioneer, evidently ill at ease and by no means elated by the vigor of the contest, called the latest bidding and waved his hammer.  
(To be Continued.)

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