

LOVE'S MAGIC CHARM.

(Continued.)

Lady Hampton was shrewd enough to see that she must abide by her niece's decision.

The Captain was to remain only two days at Darrell Court, and Lady Darrell was anxious to spend some little time with him.

"I like the captain, aunt," she said; "he amuses me."

Lady Hampton remembered how she had spoken of him before, and it was not her intention that her beautiful niece should fling away herself and her magnificent fortune on Aubrey Langton.

"She is sure to marry again," thought the lady; "and, dowered as she is, she ought to marry a duke, at least."

She represented to her that it was hardly etiquette for her, a widow so young, and her loss being so recent, to entertain a handsome young officer.

"I do not see that the fact of his being handsome makes any difference, aunt," said Lady Darrell; "still, if you think I must remain shut up in my room while the captain is here, of course, I will remain so, though it seems very hard."

"Appearances are everything," observed Lady Hampton, sagely; "and you cannot be too careful at first."

"Does he seem to pay Pauline any attention?" asked the young widow, eagerly.

"I have never heard them exchange more than a few words—indeed the circumstance has puzzled me, Elinor. I have seen him look at her as though he worshipped her and as though he hated her. As for Miss Darrell, she seems to treat him with contemptuous indifference."

"I used to think he liked her," said Lady Darrell, musingly.

"He liked the future heiress of Darrell Court," rejoined Lady Hampton. "All his love has gone with her prospects, you may rely upon it."

Lady Darrell, brought up in a school that would sacrifice even life itself for the sake of appearances, knew there was no help for her enforced retirement. She remained in her rooms until the young officer had left the Court.

Lady Hampton was not the only one who felt puzzled at Pauline's behaviour to the captain. Miss Hastings who understood her pupil perhaps better than any one, was puzzled. There was somewhat of a calm, unutterable contempt in her manner of treating him. He could not provoke her; no matter what he said, she would not be provoked into retort. She never appeared to remember his existence; no one could have been more completely ignored; and Captain Langton himself was but too cognizant of the fact. If he could have but piqued or aroused her, have stung her into some exhibition of feeling, he would have been content; but no statue could have been colder, no queen prouder. If any little attention was required at her hands she paid it, but there was no denying the fact that it was rendered in such a manner that the omission would have been preferable.

On the evening of his departure Lady Hampton went down to wish him farewell; she conveyed to him Lady Darrell's regret at not being able to do the same.

"I am very sorry," said the captain; "though of course, under the circumstances, I could hardly hope for the pleasure of seeing Lady Darrell. Perhaps you will tell her that in the autumn, with her permission, I shall hope to revisit the Court."

Lady Hampton said to herself that she should take no such message. The dearest wish of her heart was that the gallant captain should never be seen there again. But she made some very gracious reply, and then asked, suddenly:

"Have you seen Miss Darrell? Have you said good-by to her?"

Aubrey Langton looked slightly confused.

"I have not seen her to-day," he replied.

Lady Hampton smiled very graciously.

"I will send for her," she said; and when, in answer to her summons, a servant entered, she asked that Miss Darrell might be requested to favor her with her presence in the library. It did not escape her keen observation that Captain Langton would rather have avoided the interview.

Pauline entered with the haughty grace so natural to her; her proud eyes never once glanced at the captain; he was no more to her than the very furniture in the room.

"You wished to see me, Lady Hampton," she said, curtly.

"Yes—that is, Captain Langton wishes to say good-by to you; he is leaving Darrell Court this morning."

There was the least possible curl of the short upper lip. Lady Hampton happened to catch the glance bestowed upon Pauline by their visitor. For a moment it startled her—it revealed at once such hopeless passionate love and such strong passionate hate. Pauline made no reply; the queenly young figure was drawn up to its full height, the thoughtful young face was full of scorn. The captain concealed his embarrassment as he best could, and went up to her with outstretched hands.

"Good by, Miss Darrell," he said; "this has been a very sad time for you, and I deeply sympathize with you. I hope to see you again in the autumn, looking better—more like yourself."

Lady Hampton was wont to declare that the scene was one of the finest she had ever witnessed. Pauline looked at him with that straight, clear, calm gaze of hers, so terribly searching and direct.

"Good by," she said, gravely, and then, utterly ignoring the outstretched hands, she swept haughtily from the room.

Lady Hampton did not attempt to conceal her delight at the captain's discomfiture.

"Miss Darrell is very proud," he said, laughing to hide his confusion. "I must have been unfortunate enough to displease her."

But Lady Hampton saw his confusion, and in her own mind she wondered what there was between these two—why he should appear at the same time to love and to hate her—above all, why she should treat him with such sovereign indifference and contempt.

"It is not natural," she argued to herself; "young girls, as a rule, admire—nay, take an uncommon interest in soldiers. What reason can she have for such contemptuous indifference?"

How little she dreamed of the storm of rage—of passion—of anger—of fury, that warred in the captain's soul!

He was ten thousand pounds richer, but it was as a drop in the ocean to him. If it had been ten thousand per annum he might have been grateful. Ten thousand pounds would discharge every debt he had in the world, and set him straight once more; he might even lead the life he had always meant to lead for two or three years, but then the money would be gone. On the other hand, if that girl—that proud, willful, defiant girl—would but have married him, Darrell Court, with all its rich dependencies, would have been his. The thought almost maddened him.

How he loathed her as he rode away! But for her, all this grand inheritance would have been his. Instead of riding away, he would now be taking possession and be lord and master of all. Those stables with the splendid stud of horses would be his—his the magnificent grounds and gardens—the thousand luxuries that made Darrell Court an earthly paradise. All these would have been his but for the obstinacy of one girl. Curses deep and burning rose to his lips; yet, for his punishment, he loved her with a love that mastered him in spite of his hate—that made him long to throw himself at her feet, while he could have slain her for the wrong he considered that she had done him.

Lady Hampton could not refrain from a few remarks on what she had witnessed.

"Has Captain Langton been so unfortunate as to offend you, Miss Darrell?" she asked of Pauline. "I thought your adieux were of the coldest."

"Did you? I never could see the use of expressing regret that is not really felt."

"Perhaps not; but it is strange that you should not feel some little regret at losing such a visitor."

To this remark Pauline deigned nothing save an extra look of weariness, which was not lost upon Lady Hampton.

Pauline, said Miss Hastings, one morning, "I do not think you are compelled by the terms of Sir Oswald's will to reside at Darrell Court whether you like it or not. There could be no possible objection to your going away for a change."

The beautiful, restless face was turned to her.

"I could not leave Darrell Court even if I would," she returned.

"Why not? there is really nothing to detain you here."

"I am waiting," said the girl, her dark eyes lit by a fire that was not pleasant to see—"I am waiting here for my revenge."

"Oh, Pauline!" cried Miss Hastings, in real distress. "My dear child, you must forget such things. I do not like to hear such a word from your lips."

Pauline smiled as she looked at her governess, but there was something almost terrible in the calm smile.

"What do you think I am living here for—waiting here in patience for? I tell you, nothing but the vengeance I have promised myself—and it shall be mine!"

CHAPTER XXX.

WILL FATE AID PAULINE.

Six months had passed since Sir Oswald's death, and his widow had already put away her cap and heavy weeds. Six months of retirement, she considered, were a very handsome acknowledgment of all her husband's love and kindness. She was in a state of serene and perfect self-content—everything had gone well with her. People had expressed their admiration of her devotion to his memory. She knew that in the eyes of the world she was esteemed faultless. And now it seemed to Lady Darrell that the time was come in which she might really enjoy herself, and reap the reward of her sacrifice.

The "armed neutrality" between Pauline and herself still continued. Each went her own way—their interests never clashed. Lady Darrell rather preferred that Pauline should remain at the Court. She had a vague kind of fear of her, a vague dread that made her feel safer where Pauline was, and where she could know something of her. Whole days would pass without their meeting; but, now that there was to be a little more gaiety at Darrell Court, the two must expect to be brought into daily communication.

Lady Darrell was an amiable woman. It was true she had a small soul capable of maintaining small ideas only. She would have liked to be what she called "comfortable" with Pauline—to live on sisterly terms with her—to spend long hours in discussing dress, ornaments, fashionable gossip—to feel that there was always some one at hand to listen to her and to amuse her. She, in her turn, would have been most generous. She would have made ample presents of dresses and jewels to such a friend; she would have studied her comfort and interests. But to expect or to hope for a companion of that kind in Pauline was as though some humble little wood-blossom could hope to train itself round a grand, stately, sad passion flower.

Lady Darrell's wordly knowledge and tact were almost perfect; yet they