The Old Marquis

OR,

The Girl of the Cloisters

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ONLY WAY.

AN hour passed. The moon had sailed into the heavens and poured a stream of vaporish light on the church and on the two as they sat on a time-worn bench beside the porch. Lord Edgar had drawn her cloak around her as she lay against his heart to shield her from the soft summer air, and she sat with her arm around his neck, her eyes upturned to his.

"And you have been so miserable; you missed me?" she murmured, her eyes glowing with solemn joy, her face "encrimsoned with love's torch." "I thought you would have forgotten me, dear."

"As you have forgotten me?"

"Ah!" and she shuddered.

"There is not an hour of the day that I have not thought of you, my darling," he said, in his simple, outspoken fashion, "not an hour. I have been unspeakably wretched and miserable. Talk about 'twin,' on my word of honor I think another week would have made a bad lot of me if it had not been for my cousin and the Draytons!"

She started and looked up at him with a woman's sudden spasm of jealousy, but his clear, honest eyes met hers unflinchingly, unsuspectingly.

"They have been awfully kind. I don't wonder at you liking Edith Drayton. She has been like a sister to me. She will be awfully glad to know that I have found you; she has been as anxious as any one could be excepting myself."

"Yes; I will thank her some day, dear."

"You shall. She will be rejoiced at the news. And I am glad that I found you myself, and not that man Clifford employed—"

"That man!—what man?" she asked, with strange wonder.

Lord Edgar frowned. He wished that he had not told her; he hated the idea himself.

"My darling, you know I had to leave no stone unturned. I went to Clifford in my trouble. I was almost out of my mind; and he did all he could to help me. He employed a man to go about the country and try and find you. You are not angry? What could I do? Think of the suspense, the uncertainty!"

"No, no! And you took all this trouble! Ah, I was right! Grandpapa said that you would 'be upset for a couple of days, and then forget me.'"

"Your grandfather has forgotten what love is," he said.

"And the man—what sort of man was he?" she asked, knitting her brows thoughtfully.

He kissed them straight again before replying.

"I can't tell you. I never saw him, dear. Clifford thought that it would be better for me not to appear. He said—but what does it all matter, now that I have found you, my dear, sweet little Lela?"

"He said— Tell me, Edgar."

"He said that if you knew I was searching for you, you would go still further off."

She sighed.

"He was right. I should have done so! You see, I knew that I could not remain firm if once I saw you! Ah, and I was right, too! But how sensible this cousin of yours must be, dear!"

"He is. Tremendously!"

"And you don't know this horrid man who finds people out?"

"No," he said. "Why?"

She was silent for a moment, then she laughed, but thoughtfully.

"Because—it is only fancy—but there was a man here, a tall, thin man in black, who wandered about the village for several days. I saw him this morning—and always seemed to walk away when I met him. I heard the woman at the cottage say that he was a stranger in Larkworthy."

"Is that the name of this place?" he said. "You see, I didn't even know it! I came here quite by chance—heavenly chance! But it is fancy on your part, darling, for the man has not found you. He sent word to my cousin only this morning."

She laughed softly.

"I suppose he was only some odd antiquary copying the tombstones; and he was shy, and did not like meeting people."

"That was it, no doubt," he said. He would have agreed to any theory, on any subject put forth by her dear lips. "At any rate, it wasn't Clifford's man. But don't let us talk any more about this horrid week. It is gone and past and done with. The future—let us think of the future, Lela!"

"Ah, the future!" and she sighed.

He drew her closer to him.

"Mr. Temple—I must see him!"

"No," she said, swiftly. "Indeed, you must not, Edgar. If he knew that you had found me he would give up his situation and leave the place, and we should be separated again; and I could not bear that!"

And only an hour ago she had implored him to leave her! Oh, wondrous is the power of love!

He was silent for a moment.

"Very well, my darling. But you must promise to meet me often. Thank Heaven, Larkworthy is near London! I shall come here every day! I can stay here! There is the jolliest little inn—"

"No, no!" she said, with tender authority; "you must do nothing of the kind. What, stop here and let grandpapa find you and take me away!"

"Well—"

"You must not think of it! You may come down—sometimes; and I will meet you—sometimes. And—and perhaps in time grandpapa will relent, and—"

"We shall be happy?" he said, with the confidence of youth and love with its loved one near. "Very well. I ask for nothing better! I am so happy at finding you, at having you near to me, that anything would satisfy me! Heaven! if I do not wake and find that it is a dream! But, no, we will say that the past week is a dream and that this is reality."

As he spoke the clock struck ten. She started, and raised her head."

"Edgar, did you hear that? It is ten o'clock! I must go—I must—I must!" clinging wistfully. "Ah! how time flies when we want it to linger."

She drew away from him, her hands clasped on her heart.

"It is so hard to go, dear!" she whispered, devouring his handsome face with her loving eyes.

"I shall come to-morrow evening," he whispered. "I shall stay here to-night!"

"No, no!" she breathed. "Grandpapa will see you. You must go back."

"Very well," he said, obediently. "I will do whatever you tell me, my darling; anything, however hard, now that I have your promise that nothing shall separate us."

"Yes, you have that," she murmured, devoutly. "I see now that I could not live without you. No, I know that I should have died if—if you had not come back when I called you to-night! Nothing shall separate us!"

"I am satisfied," he said, fervently. "And I will come to-morrow! Let me take you as far as I dare."

He put his arm around her and they walked to the lane in which the cottage stood. A light was burning in the small sitting-room, and Lord Edgar saw the professor seated with a book at the table. He looked older and more worn and wan than he had done in the cozy room at the cloisters, but Lord Edgar's thoughts were too engrossed to notice him closely.

He gathered Lela in his arms and kissed her, and murmuring "to-morrow," she slowly drew from him and entered the cottage.

Lord Edgar stayed outside—saw her enter the room and come to the window and put her hand to her lips, knowing that he was there waiting, though she could not see him; then she drew down the blind, in obedience to the request of the professor, and Lord Edgar turned and walked back to the inn.

His blood was surging through his veins; a wild joy had possession of his heart. The past week seemed, indeed, like a dreadful dream, a veritable nightmare. He had found his darling and proved her love, and all was fair and bright before him.

He entered the inn—he had to knock, for they had closed the doors at ten o'clock—and, getting a light, went to the stable. The hostler was asleep on a heap of clean straw, but he hobbled up—all who have to do with horses are quick of hearing—and quite understood when Lord Edgar said that he must get back to London to-night and had lost the train.

"Your honor will ride, then," he said, stripping the cloth off the chestnut. "Well, he'll do it and think nothing of it. He's a fine animal, sir."

Lord Edgar re-entered the inn, drank a brandy-and-soda, paid his bill, and lighted a cigar. By that time the chestnut had been brought around, and was waiting. He patted the great beast affectionately—he felt in love with all nature and human nature to-night—tossed the delighted and astonished hostler a sovereign, and getting into the saddle started for London, the happiest man in or out of that great city.

The chestnut did its work well. He had had a good feed, and was a willing steed—when Lord Edgar rode it—and when he had made what his master considered ten miles Lord Edgar got off and walked beside it to rest it. He gave it a drink at a way-side pond now and again, and so, riding with care and kindness, as an old writer has it, reached London as the clocks were chiming half-past twelve. A wild happiness possessed Lord Edgar. The ride in the cool evening air had excited and freshened him. He took the horse to the stable, where, of course, he found a man awake and alert—it is a question often propounded whether London grooms ever sleep—and was going to his rooms when the thought struck him that he would go down to the Temple and make Clifford happy with the news of the discovery of Lela!

In his impulsive and impetuous way he hailed a hansom and drove down to the Temple, resolved, if he saw a light in Clifford Revel's windows, to go up, and if not, to return home and wait till the morning.

There was a light burning, and, telling the cabman to wait, he climbed the steep, dark stairs and knocked at the door.

He entered in response to Clifford Revel's "Come in," and found that gentleman sitting in the easy-chair and smoking a cigarette.

He had exchanged his dress-coat for a comfortable velvet jacket, and looked exquisitely cool and comfortable, a fine contrast to Lord Edgar, with the dust of a twenty-mile ride upon him.

"Ah, Edgar!" he said, rising and holding out his hand, his keen eyes noting the travel-stained clothes and happy countenance. "What has happened? Where have you been?"

Lord Edgar stood smiling and grasping his hand.

"You'll never guess, Clifford! Never, if you try from now till doomsday! Clifford, I'm the happiest man in the world, I do think!"

Clifford Revel was a wonderful actor; he knew in a moment that Lela was found, that Lord Edgar had discovered her, and yet he kept his countenance. His lids drooped over his keen eyes, but he forced a smile.

"Suppose I can?" he said. "Suppose I know all that you can tell me; that I have been to your rooms, and finding that you were out, sat up, knowing that you would come, and waited for you?"

Lord Edgar laughed, but looked rather disappointed; he wanted to have the pleasure of surprising Clifford.

"Well," he said, "I have found her, Clifford—found her by the merest chance, by simple accident—"

"I know," said Clifford Revel, with a smile. "You found her at a village called Larkworth. My man has been here this evening; he only discovered them this morning."

Lord Edgar stared.

(To be continued.)

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2814—Soft crepe, voile, batiste, Swiss, dimity, nainsook or silk would be lovely for this dainty model, with trimming of lace and insertion. The underwaist could be of lining and overlaid with material below the bolero edges. The sleeve may be finished in wrist or elbow length.

The Pattern is cut in 4 sizes: 6, 8, 10, and 12 years. Size 10 requires 4⅞ yards of 27 inch material.

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