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The Imprisoned Heiress
—OR—
The Spectre of Egremont.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I thought I would not," was the hesitating response. "Yet I will."
She opened the door and went into the study, and bent over the drooping form of the prisoner.
Almee was looking indescribably lovely, with a faint flush dyeing her pure cheeks, with a happy smile curving her red lips, and with a tender, joyous light brooding in her dusky eyes, and rippling over her sweet face.
Lady Egremont knew that she was living over again the visit of Lord Ashcroft to the haunted rooms, and she sighed deeply, hesitating to spoil the charm of that waking dream.
Almee looked up, and the smile faded as she recognized the intruder.
"Sit down, mamma," she said, gravely, gathering herself up upon the cushions.
"No, child, I cannot stay. I came merely to say good-night, and to tell you something."
"Is it about Lionel?" asked the young girl, eagerly.
The countess sighed, as she bowed assent.
"What is it? Is he ill? Is he going away?"
"No, Almee—that is, he is well. He is going to leave Egremont next week."
The maiden clasped her hands together, and her face paled, but not a murmur escaped her lips.
"That is not all, my child," continued the countess, with an effort at lightness of tone. "He will not go alone, but will take his bride with him."
The Lady Almee's lips quivered involuntarily, and a look of pain came into her eyes, but she was too proud to show her grief and looked steadily away from her visitor.
"I suppose you want to hear all the gossip, love?" resumed Lady Egremont. "The truth is, Lord Ashcroft wishes to be married within a week, and Alexina is very anxious to go to town, so the marriage is to be hastened."
"I wish I could see Alexina," murmured Almee.
"Why so, love?"
"I should like to see for myself if she is worthy of Lionel. She ought to be a very happy girl. Is she?"
"Oh, yes. Young ladies are always happy to be married, I suppose," returned the countess, indifferently. "I am glad you bear the news so well, Almee. I had feared you would take it differently."
The little maiden forced a proud smile to her now pale mouth, and looked up into the face of her visitor with a glance meant to show how care-free she was.
But the countess was not deceived, and soon took her departure, ill at ease.
The moment she was gone Almee's

her dull eyes becoming duller, and the odor of laudanum diffusing itself throughout Almee's pure little bower. "I've been kept awake so much lately that I don't feel at all like myself. Go to bed early, my dear, and don't get me into trouble."
With that admonition, Toplift returned to the drawing-room.
She closed the door between carefully, and then concealed her key under the hearth-rug, in the indentation of the floor, which has been described; and this task accomplished, she felt at ease in regard to her charge.
"Poor little thing!" she muttered, going to her couch. "Lady Egremont may well pity her. Sometimes I feel so sorry for her I could confess the whole dreadful truth, and I would too, if I knew I should come out safe, and that I should make more by it than my lady gives me. But I shouldn't be believed, I suppose, and I can force my lady to give me more."
She was still muttering when she dropped off to sleep.
When her slumbers had become profound, Almee came out of her little bower, secured the key from its hiding-place, and made her egress from the "haunted" rooms.
She hastened with still, noiseless movements to the picture-gallery.
No one was there when she entered it, and, with a disappointed look, she went toward the little bronze stove, near which Lord Ashcroft had sat on the occasion of their former meeting.
The fire was low in the stove, but the gallery was warm enough from the heat that had been generated during the day.
There was no moonlight, but there was a dim, faint light sufficient to outline the picture-frames, the caken seats, etc., and to make the gloom that nestled in the corners unpleasant to look upon.
She lingered but a brief space by the stove, making her way to the arched window at the end, looking down into the gloomy garden.
Thus half an hour passed, and she started at every noise, fearing that her absence from her rooms had been discovered, and when at last she heard a hand upon the door-latch, she shrank back into the gloom, fearing to meet the angry eyes of Lady Egremont.
It was not the countess who entered, but the manly form of Lord Ashcroft.
A feeling of confusion came over her, and she hesitated to come out from the shadow corner where she was hidden.
"Almee!" called her lover, softly, his tones lingering with ineffable tenderness upon the sweet French name. "Almee, are you here?"
"Yes, Lionel," she answered, involuntarily, the blood rushing hotly to her face. "Here I am; and she stepped forward into the light.
With a quick tread he advanced to her side.
As they stood near the window she could see that his face was transfused with gladness, and that his eyes beamed with unusual luster.
He held out his arms to her, but she retreated from his embrace.
"Almee, love," he said, in quick, glad tones, "do not shrink from me. Let me hold you to your rightful home."
Unheeding her faint struggles, he clasped her to his heart and showered kisses upon her surprised face.
"Let me go, Lionel!" she exclaimed, half indignantly, striving to free herself. "I am only your sister."
"Only my sister, Almee? Have I deceived myself?" groaned her lover.
"I thought you loved me, Almee!"
"You thought I loved the betrothed husband of another?"
"Forgive me, Almee. I did think so, I love you with all my heart, and I have longed so to make you my wife. I am free, Almee!"
"Free!" she repeated, incredulously. "Why, mamma told me you were to marry Alexina next week."
"She was mistaken. I shall never marry her. I am free, Almee, free, and I thought you loved me," he added, despairingly.
"Are you no longer bound to Alexina?" she asked, timidly.
"No, Almee."
"But mamma said you could not be free without forfeiting a large amount of money."
"I will forfeit it!"
Almee withdrew entirely from his arms, and said, sadly:

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Fort Greville, N. S.—"I took your medicine for a terrible pain in my side and for weakness and headaches. I seemed to float all over, too, and my feet and hands were the worst. I am the mother of four children and I am nursing my baby—the first one of four I could nurse. I took Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound before the baby's birth, so you can see how much it helped me. I cannot praise it too highly for what it has done for me. I took all kinds of medicines, but the Vegetable Compound is the only one that has helped me for any length of time. I recommend it to any one with troubles like mine and you may use my letter for a testimonial."—Mrs. ROBERT McCULLY, Fort Greville, Nova Scotia.
Before and after childbirth the mother will find Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound a blessing.
Many, many letters are received giving the same sort of experience as is given in this letter. Not only is the mother benefited, but these good results pass on to the child.
No harmful drugs are used in the preparation of this medicine—just roots and herbs—and it can be taken in safety by the nursing mother.
96 out of every 100 women reported benefit from its use in a recent canvass among women users of this medicine.

Ex-Sultan's Love Romance.

Under the heading "The Last Marriage of the Last Sultan," a Turkish newspaper prints a picturesque account, which reads like a page from the "Arabian Nights," of the marriage of Mehmed VI., the Sultan who was dethroned in November, 1922, with the young daughter of one of his palace gardeners. The tale is signed by one Selah-ed-Din Bey, who states that he heard it from a palace official. The name of the gardener's daughter, says the boy, is Nevvad. She was 15 and a marvel of beauty. The Sultan was then 51. One day, when she was dusting the Sultan's departments, he noticed her and desired to speak to her. "It's a long long time since I saw you, little one," he began.
Nevvad confessed to the slaves that night: "His Majesty has desired to speak kindly to me."
Next day there was great activity at the palace. The word went round that the Sultan was going to marry, but no one knew who the favoured one was. It was the gardener's daughter.
Two days afterwards she was taken to the splendidly furnished apartments provided for her. To the outside world it was announced that, in accordance with tradition, his Majesty took to wife a young and beautiful maiden.
From that moment the Sultan spent more time than ever in the harem. He developed a distaste for official ceremonies. Political events irritated him. He became invisible for days at a time.
Then came the downfall of the Greeks and the train of unhappy events leading to his flight at dawn from the palace and his embarkation in a British warship. He took only the first and second wives with him.
In his exile in Switzerland his wives soon noticed his depression and inquired the cause. One day he revealed it with tears. A short while afterwards a letter reached Nevvad in Constantinople, saying "Come to me, Nevvad. Don't fail. I cannot live without you."
Then one of the Sultan's attendants came here to take her back to him. Nevvad hesitated. She reviewed her situation, saw that she would be obliged to sell her jewels little by little to live, like the other palace women who had been abandoned, and—she went.
Selah-ed-Din Bey vouches for the truth of the story and says that he can produce the exiled Sultan's letter. He adds that the fact that Nevvad has not returned shows that the girl is happy in this strangely assorted union with an elderly and homeless monarch.

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SIDE TALKS.
By Ruth Cameron.

"IF AS MUCH."
If there's one time in the world when you wish you were rich with all your heart it's along about now, isn't it?
What a fascinating game it is to beguile some tedious wait by thinking of the things you would get the children and their daddy for Christmas if you had \$100 to spend for each! I wonder if there ever was a woman who didn't sometime play some form of that group-up "let's pretend."
I know one woman who used to. She told me so one day last week. And the interesting part of it is that now she has the \$100. So, of course, she must be perfectly happy. Is she?
Well, I'll let her tell you about it. The way the conversation started was this. A group of us had been talking about Christmas shopping and this woman had said: "Oh dear, I am simply frantic. I can't think of anything to give Jimmie."
When You Save From the Household Money.
"You, Marge, with all the money you earn," protested one of the other women in the group, enviously. "I guess if I could earn money singing the way you do I wouldn't be worrying about what I'd give Phil. It's when you don't have but a few dollars that you save out of your household money that it's hard."
"Yes, but—" began Marge hesitatingly, and then stopped altogether. "Oh, well, I guess I'm stupid about thinking of things," she finally ended.
Afterward "Marge" explained to me. "I couldn't say it just then, but you know what the trouble is. Jimmy earns so much money himself now that when he wants anything very badly he goes and buys it. We both do. Of course it's nice in lots of ways but, honestly, Christmas isn't quite as much fun as it used to be when we wanted things just awfully, and got them for each other. Of course now there are some expensive things like wrist watches and special luxuries for the machine and things like that, we can give each other but mostly they aren't things we want as hard as the things we used to want."
The Long Felt Want Is Filled.
"I remember the year I didn't have the right kind of slippers to go with my one dress-up frock. My cousin had a pair that were just what I wanted, and it seemed as if I must have a pair like that. And Jim got my cousin to buy them and there they were sticking out of my stockings Christmas morning. I just squealed."
"And the year I gave Jim a special kind of pipe he was crazy for. I knew because I saw him admiring his brother-in-law's, and I telephoned him and got him to buy it, and Jimmie was so pleased and surprised it was wonderful."
"Now I go buy my slippers and Jim buys his pipes, I used to lie in bed and

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