

The Heart of a Woman

By BARONESS ORCZY.

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CHAPTER XI.

and There Are Social Duties to Perform.

The first November fog.

The world had waged on its matter-of-fact way for more than six months now, since that day in April when Philip de Montford—under cover of his title—had made his way into Lord Radclyffe's presence; more than five months since the favored nephew had been so unceremoniously thrust out of his home.

Spring had yielded to summer, summer given away to autumn, and already winter was treading hard on autumn's heels. The autumn session had filled London with noise and bustle, with political dinner parties and monster receptions, and with all the usual theatres, and volumes of ephemeral literature.

And at that was—tonight—wrapped in a dense fog, the first of the season, quite a stranger, too, in London, for scientists had asserted positively that the era of the traditional "pea-soupers" was over; the metropolis would know it no more.

Colonel Harris was in town with his wife, Lady Evelyn, and Lord Radclyffe, and at London weather in true country fashion. He declared that fog paralyzed his intellect that he became positively imbecile, not knowing how to fight his way in the folds of such a black pall. Taxi-drivers he mistrusted; in fact, he had all an old sportsman's hatred of mechanically propelled vehicles, whilst he flitted restlessly to bring valuable horses up to town, to catch their death of cold whilst waiting outside in the fog.

So Luke had promised to pilot the party as far as the Danish Legation, where they were to dine tonight. This was the only condition under which Colonel Harris would consent to enter one of those confounded motor-cars.

Colonel Harris had remained loyal to the cause of Luke and his fortune. It is a way of sportsman's honor, and he had never interfered by word or deed in Luke's actions with regard to her engagement. His daughter was old enough, he said, to know her own mind. She liked Luke, and it would be shabby to leave him in the lurch, now that the last of the society-rats were scurrying to leave the skating ship.

They were doing it, too, in a number of the invitations which the penniless young man received toward the end of the London season were considerably fewer than those which were showered on him at the beginning, before the world had realized that Philip de Montford had come to stay, and would one day be Earl of Radclyffe with a rent roll of eight thousand pounds a year, and the sort of need of a wife.

It had all begun with the bridge parties. Luke would no longer play, since he could no longer afford to lose a quarter's income one sitting. Under the pretext of being indifferent to such losses, and place blank checks at the dear boy's disposal. Imagine then how welcome Luke was at bridge parties, and how very undesirable now.

Then he could no longer make return for hospitable entertainments. He had no home to which to ask smart friends. Lord Radclyffe thought a mortgage of £10,000 was a splendid dinner party at which Luke was quite host. Now it was all give and no take; and the giver retired one by one, quite unregretted by Luke, who thus was spared the initiative of turning his back on his friends. They did the turning, quite politely but very effectively. Luke scarcely noticed how he was dropping out of his former circle. He was a simpleton, and really did not care. Moreover his dress clothes were getting shabby.

Tonight at the Langham, when he arrived at about seven o'clock as to have an undisturbed half-hour with Lord Radclyffe, he greeted him with outstretched hand and a cordial welcome.

"Hello, Luke, my boy! how goes it with you?"

Louise said nothing, but her eyes welcomed him, and she drew near to him, on to the sofa in front of the fire, and allowed her hand to rest in his, for she knew how he loved the touch of it. There was beginning to say that Louise Harris was getting old; she never had been good-looking, poor thing; but always smart, very smart—now she was losing her smartness, and what remained was faded and faded.

She had come up to town this autumn in last autumn's frocks! and the twins were after all the chaperons by their smart. Would that smart engagement never be broken off? Fanny Louise Harris married to a poor man! Why, she did not know how to do her hair, and dresses were still worn fastened at the back, and would be for years to come! Lord Radclyffe, no French maid! Cheap corsets and clean gloves! It was unthinkable.

Perhaps the engagement was virtually broken off—anyhow the wedding could never take place.

Unless Philip de Montford happened to die.

But it did not look as if the engagement was broken off. Not at all. The rate on the London market was high, and the rate on the London market was high, and the rate on the London market was high.

"How is Lord Radclyffe?" asked Colonel Harris.

"Badly," replied Luke. "I am afraid. He looks very feeble, and his asthma I know must bother him. He was always weak in foggy weather."

"He ought to go to Algeria. He always used to."

"I know," assented Luke dejectedly. "Can't something be done? Surely, Luke, you haven't lost all your influence with him?"

"Every bit, sir. Why, I hardly ever see him."

"Hardly ever see him?" ejaculated Colonel Harris, and I am afraid that he swears.

"I haven't been to Grosvenor Square for over six weeks. I am only allowed to see him when Philip is out, or by special permission from Philip. I won't go under such conditions."

"How that house must have altered!"

"You wouldn't know it, sir! All the old servants have gone, one after the other. They had rows with Philip and left at a month's notice. I suppose he has no idea how to set about getting new ones. I know I shouldn't! There's only a man and his wife, a sort of charwoman who cleans and cooks, and the man is supposed to look after Uncle Rad; but he doesn't do it, for he is half seas over most of the time."

"Good God!" murmured Colonel Harris. "They have shut up all the rooms, except the library where Uncle Rad and I used to sit."

Philip have their meals when they are at home. But they lunch and dine at their club nearly."

"What club do they go to? I called in at the Athenaeum last night, thinking to find Radclyffe there, but the hall porter told me that he never went there now."

"No. He and Philip have joined some new club in Shaftesbury Avenue. The 'Veterans' I think it is called."

"Some low, mixed-up kind of place! Old Radclyffe must be out of his senses."

"He knows it, he tells me, because people don't come and bother him there. I should think not indeed. I wouldn't set foot in such a place."

"It goes there, my evenings, and so does Philip—and it's so bad for Uncle Rad to be out late these foggy nights."

"You ought to make an effort and stop it, Luke."

"I have made many efforts, sir. But, as a matter of fact, I had made up my mind to make a final one tonight. Uncle Rad ought to go abroad, and I thought I should try to impress this on Philip. He can't be 'the man'."

"Oh! can't he?" was Colonel Harris's muffled comment.

"At any rate, if I have no influence, he has, and he must exert it, and get Uncle Rad down to Algeria or anywhere he likes so long as it is well south."

Luke paused awhile, his face flushed with this expression of determination which must have caused him to make many a bitter pang. Then he resumed more quietly:

"It's rather humiliating, isn't it, to go to that man as a suppliant? You must insist on your uncle being properly looked after."

Colonel Harris thought all that sort of thing so easy. One always does before one has had a genuine taste of the unpalatable realities of life; to the good country squire with an assured position, an assured income, assured influence, it seemed very easy indeed to insist. He himself never had had a taste of the unpalatable, and at his word, as it were, of his own.

But Louise, knowing how matters stood, made no suggestion. She knew that Luke had had a genuine taste of the unpalatable, and she knew that he was a simpleton, and she knew that he was a simpleton, and she knew that he was a simpleton.

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"Good God!" murmured Colonel Harris. "They have shut up all the rooms, except the library where Uncle Rad and I used to sit."

"But somebody ought to go."

"Edie would be only too willing—if she is allowed."

"No," he said with a smile. "What will Reggie Dugan have to say to that?"

"Nothing," he replied quietly. "Reggie Dugan has said off to his own."

"You don't mean that?"

"He has given up Edie who has little or nothing a year, and become engaged to Marian Montagu, who has eight thousand pounds a year in her own."

"Poor Edie!" murmured Louise, whilst Colonel Harris's exclamation was equally to the point and far more forcible, and more particularly concerned the honorable Reggie Dugan.

"Yes," rejoined Luke, "it has hit her hard, coming on the top of other things. He is not gaining the fact, it is there. Colonel Harris said that we four brothers and sister owe something to Uncle Arthur's son."

"What handle of a riding whip," came from out the depths of Colonel Harris's fur coat. "Stupid was parsons have of saying that to wish a man dead is tantamount to murder. I am committing murder, new for a matter of fact, for I wish that blackguard were buried in one of his native antiques."

"Would to God," added Luke, "that whirling alone would do it."

"The man was a brute, and his conduct and contempt in those words that Louise instinctively whispered:

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to lose a future peerage all of a sudden and he has no private fortune either."

"I heard there were awful rows between the cousins until Lord Radclyffe himself turned Luke and the others out of the house."

"And now Philip de Montford has been murdered."

"And the police will seek him whom the crime benefits."

"It certainly looks very suspicious."

"A real cause celebre! Won't it be exciting?"

"Something to read about in one's morning papers."

"I shall say and get reserved seats for the trial. I hate a crash, don't you?"

"Will they issue him, do you think?"

"If he is found guilty—English justice is no respecter of persons."

"How awful!"

"And a terrible, senseless talk, inasmuch as the police station was the scene of the fog. They penetrated everywhere, in the lobbies of the theatres, the boulevard of madame and the smoking room of the lord. They penetrated to the magnificent reception rooms of the Danish Legation, and Louise heard the remarks even before she knew the full details of the story. Louise and a well-trained contralto voice, and had been asked to sing in the course of the evening. Just as she stood in an outer room selecting her music, she heard a group of idlers—men and women—talking over the mysterious murder in the fact."

They had at first been unconscious of her presence. She had her back toward them, turning over the leaves of her song book. But then she was struck by the conversation; one of the chatterboxes must have pointed her out to the others.

Whereupon Louise, serene and smiling, sang a song of the nightingale, and the merry group broke out into applause.

"Please," she said, "don't stop. I have heard nothing yet. And of course I want to know."

The group of men laughed incoherently and the ladies murmured little nothings.

"Oh!" said some one, "it may be true. Such lots of wild rumors get about."

"What," asked Louise placidly, "may be true?"

"Philip de Montford has been murdered."

"Well," murmured one of the ladies, "they say it was Mr. de Montford; but they can't be sure, can they?"

"Indeed, Countess, why should you think that?"

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Battersea Park, her first meeting with Luke after his letter to her—the letter which had come to her in the Palace Hotel and which had made her the happiest woman in all the world. Memory—satisfied—had it last emptied the storehouse of that one cell and left Louise Harris standing there, staring at her father, her ears humming with the tale and her responsible chatter of the outside world mind seeing all that had happened outside the door of the cell.

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that the police officer saw little or nothing of that inward struggle for self-mastery which was being put so severely to the test.

Lord Radclyffe, face to face with the awful event, strove by every power at his command, to remain dignified and impassive. The lessons taught by generations of ancestors had to bear fruit now, when a representative of the ancient name stood confronting the greatest crisis that one of his kind has ever had to face—the brutal, vulgar fact of a common murder. The realities of a sordid life brought within the four walls of a solemn, aristocratic old house.

(To be continued.)

"THE DAY"

Pierce and Bragart German Poem of Victory over Britain.

(London Express.)

A remarkable poem on the subject of a great naval battle between the fleets of Britain and Germany appeared recently in the "Sunday Times," and is quoted in "The Fleet."

It was signed O. C. Cabot, and is a poem of triumph from the German point of view, when the German battleships outnumbered the British.

It begins:

Hail to our Fatherland, mighty and glorious!

Broken is Britain's pride. Deep in the sea's wide, Slumber her battleships; Hail to thee, Fatherland! Master on sea and land!

Hail to thee, Fatherland! Ever victorious! The British fleet is broken!

Up rose the dawn; we saw With gladness and with awe The ships of England rise To our expectant eyes. Set on the sea's wide, Slumber her battleships; Hail to thee, Fatherland! Master on sea and land!

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