



## The Web; OR, TRUE LOVE'S PASSION.

### CHAPTER XXVIII. Spurred.

"She must stay," he said to Guildford Berton, in an undertone, but Norah heard him and murmured her gratitude. "Better send for a nurse, and Lady Norah can remain and assist her."

Guildford Berton went downstairs and dispatched a servant to one of the hospitals, then flung himself into the chair from which the earl had fallen, and covering his eyes with his hands, thought deeply.

The earl might die, but if he lived, it was scarcely probable that he would regain the full use of his senses. In either case he, Guildford Berton, was safe and secure.

But if he died, how would Lady Norah stand? She was to be his wife, and he had a right to inquire, he told himself, and his eyes wandered to the small iron deed box which always accompanied the earl.

It would contain either the will or a copy of it. He must see that at any cost.

He sat staring at the box and turning over possibilities in his eager mind until he heard the doctor coming down the stairs, and he rose and met him.

"He is still the same. I don't think I can do any more to-night, Mr. Berton; you can send for me if there should be any change, which I do not anticipate, however. I need scarcely say that perfect quietude and an absence of all disturbing influences, etc., is necessary. I am sorry that Lord Santeleigh is not here," he added, as he put on his overcoat.

"He shall be found," said Guildford Berton, impressively. "I do hope there is some chance for my old friend!" and he turned away and passed his hand over his eyes.

The doctor looked down.

"There is a chance of his living," he said, gravely, "but I fear, I very much fear, that he will never regain the power of speech—that is, intelligent speech. Of course, there is no need to apprise Lady Norah of this mournful fact, yet a while."

Guildford Berton let him out, and then returning to the library, softly locked the door and got down the deed box. It was locked, and the key was in the earl's pocket. He stood for a moment irresolute. A sharp blow with the poker would smash the lock, no doubt, but the lawyers might ask disagreeable questions.

He set the box in its place and stole upstairs. The earl's valet was standing outside the door in readiness, in case he should be wanted, and he stood aside to let Guildford Berton pass.

"No, I won't go in just yet, La-farge," he said, softly. "It is not too well to have too many in the room. By the way, I think I should remove his lordship's clothes from the room. The sight of them might disturb him. You know his love of neatness."

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The man was too bewildered and overcome to feel surprised, but timidly went in on tiptoe and gathered the clothes from the chair on which they had been thrown.

"Give them to me; I will take them to the dressing-room," said Guildford Berton. "You had better not leave your post, in case you may be wanted."

"Yes, sir, thank you," said the valet, and Guildford Berton carried the clothes to the dressing-room. The keys were in the coat pocket, and he carried them downstairs into the library. His hand shook as he unlocked the box and turned out the papers, and his heart leapt as he found among them one indorsed:

"My last will and testament."

It was on an ordinary sheet of foolscap, and written in the earl's small neat—not to say finicking—hand, and Guildford Berton made himself comfortable in the easy-chair and read it carefully.

His own name, after that of the old servants to whom legacies were bequeathed, occurred first, and the small handwriting jumped up and down before his eyes. Then he laughed with bitter cynicism. The earl had left him only a favorite watch and chain, "as a mark of my esteem and regard."

A watch and chain for all the years of patient service and endurance! Then came the important clause.

"And the remainder of all that I possess, or have power to bequeath, I will to my daughter—"

Strange to say, a blank occurred where the name should have been written.

He puzzled over this singular fact for some minutes, then turned to the date, and hit upon the solution. The earl had made the will soon after Norah's arrival at the Court, and he had not known with any certainty whether she had been christened any other name in addition to Norah.

Doubtless he had intended to ask and fill in the space, but he must have forgotten it—or being too proud to ask her the question, had put it off from day to day, and left the space blank.

Guildford Berton held the will in his hands, thinking almost painfully. He had no great liking for forgery, but he would not have hesitated to manufacture a new will, leaving everything to himself, if he had thought it politic to do so. But forgery is, in a sense, more risky than murder, and he shook his head.

Besides, what need to alter the will, seeing that Norah, to whom all was left, would certainly be his wife? For at that moment he felt more assured of his ultimate success than he had ever done. Fate had stood by him with a persistence almost miraculous, and his luck would remain with him to the end.

He put the will back, and the deed box in its place, and leaning back gave himself up to the luxury of anticipation.

If he could only have the title, as well as Norah and the earl's money! Or the Court! But they must both go to the wandering vagabond of a nephew—the Viscount Santeleigh, who was no one knew where!

"Perhaps he might be persuaded to sell his birthright even now, and the knowledge of the earl's illness could be kept from him," he thought; and at the mere thought that he, Guildford Berton, might some day reign and rule in the great house at which his father was steward, his blood grew warm and his heart beat pleasantly.

At any rate, Norah—his future wife!—would be one of the wealthiest women in England. The earl could not make another will, and he, Guild-

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ford Berton, would take care the existing one should not be destroyed. Altogether, he spent a pleasant hour or two, while Norah upstairs sat holding the unconscious hand of the stricken earl.

### CHAPTER XXIX. Only a Dream.

Three days before the papers announced the "serious illness of the Right Honorable the Earl of Arrowdale," Cyril Burne sat at work upon the beach at Lorient.

Brittany was anything but a beastly place, as Jack Wesley had declared, and the prospect of golden sands, deep blue sea and sky, and rugged rocks ought to have filled Cyril's artistic soul with rapture.

But the expression on his face was anything but rapturous, and he worked at his picture with the stolid, dogged countenance of a convict pursuing his allotted task.

Every now and then he stopped painting and stared at the canvas as if he were looking through it, and at such times his head sank upon his breast, and what little light had been in his eyes died out, and a hopeless, sick-and-sorry look crept over his handsome face; a look which was not good to see on the countenance of a man young, clever, and with all the world before him.

It is scarcely necessary to say that at these times he was thinking of Norah. It would be rather difficult to say when he was not thinking of her; and just as her thoughts of him were full of problems and unanswerable enigmas, so were his of her.

When a man falls in love with a girl, he flatters himself that at least he knows and understands her nature.

For instance: If any one had asked Cyril to describe Norah, he would have summed her up somewhat in this fashion:

"Beautiful, truthful, loving, honest as the day to all the world, and faithful to me unto death!"

And this girl, this pearl among women, had quietly and coolly flitted him; had either grown tired of him in a few days, or thrown him over at the behest of her father.

The more he thought of her and her desertion of him, the more bitter he became, the more puzzled, and the more miserable. For, notwithstanding her treatment of him, he knew that he loved her still—that if she chose to turn to him and whistle him to her side he must fly, to her, and kneel at her feet just as much her worshipper and slave as he had ever been.

In the words of the Persian poet, Sadi, he had given his heart to her, and could not take it back.

"Twas hers, though she should love him never,"

"Twas hers for ever and forever."

Behind him, perched on the cliffs, was the house which Lord Newall had built for himself, but his lordship had gone away and left Cyril sole master. In fact, his lordship had found the young artist so gloomy and morose a companion that he could not stand him for longer than a week, and had flown in self-defense.

Cyril would have flown, too; quite a hundred times a day had he been as-

sailed by an intense longing to kick his unfinished picture into the sea and start off somewhere, or anywhere; but he had learned something else beside the knack of painting, and that was that for his complaint there was no remedy half so efficacious as hard work. He could manage to forget Norah—say, for a quarter of an hour at a time—while he was painting, and he felt that if he threw up his work and wandered off with nothing to do but brood over his trouble, he should probably go mad.

So he worked on silently and moodily. The good people of Lorient, who are sociable enough if you rub them the right way, could make nothing of the young painter who was staying at "mildred's" house. The men got nothing in answer to their genial "Bon jour, monsieur," but a growl, and the girls—most of them were terribly pretty—might as well have cast their smiles at the rocks and stones as bestow them upon the handsome young foreigner who did nothing but paint, paint, paint, or tramp, tramp, tramp up and down the seashore.

They called him "The Silent Englishman."

On this particular afternoon he went on painting and thinking till the fading light warned him that it was time to leave off painting and take to thinking only, and he was just about to rise and put his things together, when he heard a step on the beach behind him.

He did not turn his head, because when he did so, the peasants, who occasionally strayed from the fields across the beach, would persist in trying to talk to him, and he kept his eyes fixed sullenly before him until the footsteps came close behind him, and a voice said:

"Good-evening, sir."

At the sound of the voice Cyril started around, and at the sight of the speaker, let his brush fall.

"Jack!" he exclaimed.

Jack Wesley nodded with his old, half-cynical smile.

"How doth the busy bee," he said. "Well, lad, how goes the picture?"

Cyril laughed, still holding his hand and wringing it.

"Why, man, where did you come from?" he demanded. "What on earth brings you here?"

"I will be merciful and not reply the Havre boat and my own legs," said Jack, smiling. "Is there any law, French or otherwise, which forbids me to put foot on Briton shore?"

"I—I couldn't tell you how glad I am to see you if I tried!" said Cyril, his face flushed with the unexpected pleasure. "I was thinking of you not ten minutes ago, I was, indeed. How well you look, Jack!"

"And how unwell you look, Cyril!" he retorted, smiling still, but with a sneaking suspicion of tenderness in his voice, for the flush had died out of Cyril's face, and it looked pale and harassed. "What's the matter, lad? Brittany air doesn't suit you?"

"Oh, I'm all right," replied Cyril, avoiding the kindly, keen eye.

"And this is the picture?" said Jack, standing before it.

"Yes," said Cyril, glad to get away from the subject of his looks. "What do you think of it?"

"Pretty, very," replied Jack, after a long stare at it. "I like the composition. That piece of gray-green is good, decidedly good."

Then he stopped and looked hard at it, and went behind the easel and stared at the back of it.

"What on earth are you looking for?" asked Cyril, half smilingly.

"The heart in it," replied Jack, ironically.

Cyril colored.

"You may look all day and not find it," he said, bitterly, "because there is no heart in it. But never mind the picture. Here, help me with these things, and let us get up to the house."

(To be continued.)

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