The Imprisoned Heiress

—OR—

The Spectre of Egremont.

CHAPTER XVII.

He then turned to go, but she caught him by the arm, detaining him and cried, in a voice full of anguish:

"Stay, father. Why is it that you avoid looking at me lately? Why do you act so strangely?"

"Nonsense, lass——"

"But it is not nonsense. Oh, father, I overheard what Gosman said to you about borrowing a gun. I couldn't help hearing it. And when you denied it your voice did not sound truthful."

"So my own girl accuses me of lying?" demanded Kay, angrily.

Jessy regarded him steadily, and his angry eyes fell before her gaze, his color faded, and he moved about uneasily.

"Father," she said, solemnly, "I do believe you borrowed the gun. But I do not believe you intended to commit a murder with it. I think you borrowed it, and fired it by accident at Lord Ashcroft's carriage, and then became frightened and ran away. Is it not so? Oh, do not hesitate to own the truth. Remember that Gosman's life and my happiness depend upon your word."

"You are wild, girl," returned the head-forester, flinging off her hand from his arm. "Let Kepp prove that I borrowed his gun, if he can. When he can do that then I'll own it. In your anxiety for him you forget me. You don't seem to think that, should I own to borrowing the gun, I should be accused of trying to kill his lordship in his sleep. The person that made the first assault made the second."

Jessy shrank from her father instinctively, for she believed him to have made the first, although by accident.

"No, lass, I am not yet crazy. You won't get me to own anything that'll send me abroad, that you won't! I've no fancy to be transported. Besides, Kepp must be the assassin. The evidence against him is as plain as day. My lord thinks he's guilty and his lordship won't be likely to be deceived."

Jessy silently wrung her hands.

"You can think what you choose, Jess. The facts can't be altered. Gosman is the assassin, but why he should want to kill Lord Ashcroft I can't see . It'll all come out yet—see if it don't. In the meantime, the less you have to say to Kepp the better. If your name gets mixed up with his now you may lose all chance of ever getting a husband."

With this advice, the head-forester abruptly quitted the cottage, and Jessy resumed her seat by the fire, quivering with indignation.

"I want no husband but Gosman," she said, aloud. "I wish I was married to him this minute. Father used to think so much of him. Why should he have turned against him all of a sudden when Gosman wanted to marry me? Father would have been just as likely to commit a murder a Gosman and I know he borrowed that gun—I know he did."

She was thus talking and sobbing, when she heard a faint tapping upon the window-pane and looking up, startled, she beheld a wild and haggard face pressed close to the glass."

It was the face of her lover.

With a cry of joy, she sprang up and raised the window.

"Is your father here?" inquired the under-forester, peering into the room anxiously.

"No, Gosman, I am all alone. Come in."

Kepp sprang through the window into the room, and then closed the sash. He then crossed the floor and bolted the door that opened upon the piazza, and returned to Jessy's side.

"How strangely you act, Gosman! And how strangely you look;" added the girl, pityingly, noticing his strange pallor and frightened air. "Has anything else happened?"

"Oh, Jessy, I am being hunted to death!" cried the under-forester, despairingly, flinging to the floor a small bundle he carried. "I've come here to say good-bye and to give you back your promise. Here is the half sixpence."

He fumbled in his bosom for the broken bit of silver which had served as a token of betrothal between them.

"Why, Gosman, I don't understand you. I don't want my promise back, and I won't take the sixpence. Not unless you are tired of me."

"Tired of you, Jessy! Oh you know how I love you and that I cannot live without you! But I can't make your life miserable. A pretty protector I'd make, when I'm not safe an hour. You might marry one of the other under-foresters, or even look higher. The steward's son admires you."

"But I don't admire him," interrupted Jessy, with a toss of her head. "If I don't marry you, I'll die an old maid—there."

Instead of overwhelming her with thanks, her lover groaned.

"Your father won't let you have me, Jessy," he said. "Besides, I shan't be here. I'm off now for the nearest seaport."

"Going away?"

"Yes, and mother doesn't suspect. But I couldn't leave you in ignorance, Jessy. I wanted you to think o' me sometimes when I'm far away."

"Going away?" repeated the girl. "Do you think it would be better to go off than to live this thing down?"

"I'd live it down if I could, Jessy, but I'm being hunted to death. It keeps coming up worse and worse. You know that I have a cousin who is a waiter up at the great house? He lets me know everything that he hears there about me. He came down to our cottage a few minutes since and told me what he heard said at the breakfast table."

"What was it?"

"Why, that there was another attempt made on Lord Ashcroft's life last night."

Jessy uttered a suppressed shriek

"It was so, Jessy. Lord Ashcroft told his sister of it before breakfast, in answer to her questions, and her ladyship told it at the breakfast table. Her ladyship said that she asked his lordship if he had had any visit from his enemy last night, and he told her. My cousin thinks they are going to arrest me. It was poison this time."

"But can you prove you were at home?"

"No, I can't. I was there, but alone, for mother was watching with old Peggy Waters, who is at death's door. It does seem as though fate was against me. There's no use tryin' to hold my head up, Jessy, or to stay here. I'll be arrested and transported if I attempt it. I saw a picture once of a man in the coils of a terrible big snake, and the more the man tried to get away the tighter the snake coiled itself around him. It's the same with me. Everything goes against me. There's your father, that I lent that gun to and he denied it, and everybody believes him, and no one believes me. I wouldn't wonder if he were——"

"Oh, don't, Gosman, don't!" pleaded Jessy. "Don't say he is guilty. I cannot bear to think either of you are. I know you are not."

Her tones implied a doubt of her father's entire innocence.

"I don't say he is guilty, Jessy, dear," said the youth, sadly. "I can hardly believe that he is—yet what else can I think? Why should he deny borrowing the gun? If he were only to own to the truth, maybe it would help me. It's hard for me to believe him guilty of so awful a crime, for I respected him as a father. He was almost a father to me until lately, but somehow everything has changed suddenly I don't know what to think. I can't recognize myself for the light-hearted boy I was last week. Sometimes I am ready to turn my hand against myself."

"Oh, no, no! Never that, Gosman," cried Jessy, in an agony of fear.

"For your sake, and my soul's sake, Jessy, I will never commit any crime!" declared the under-forester. "But I shall, I must go way, or I shall be transported for crimes I never attempted. I couldn't tell mother that I am going. She doesn't dream of the suspicions against me, and you must break 'em to her."

"Oh, I can't Gosman."

"Not if I beg you to?"

The girl hesitated, and then bowed assent.

"I've a store of money and things," said the youth, "and she will be comfortable. But I wish you'd see to her now and then. She'll need comfort sorely—poor mother! Your father ain't likely to continue his friendship to her, and he may put some one else into the cottage where I had hoped to spend my days. Well, well, there's no use grieving," and his lip quivered.

"I'll be good to your mother, Gosman," said Jessy, with tears. "She shall be my mother as well as yours. Don't be troubled on her account. And I'll be true to you, Gosman, dear, till the day of my death. What trouble this wedding of the Lady Alexina has brought upon us."

(To be continued.)

"I Suffered Terribly With Sore, Aching Back"

Mrs. Roland Ferguson, 194 Lake St., Peterboro, Ont., writes:

"For over two years I suffered terribly with sore back. I was almost mad with the pain, and had doctored with it until I was discouraged. Then my father, who is a firm believer in Dr. Chase's Medicines, advised me to try Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills. I followed his advice, and am glad to say I was completely relieved of that torturing pain in my back. It is over a year since I used these pills, and I have had no return of the trouble, but always keep them in the house."

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Garden Spots of the Jungle

A story of a new Golconda, a land of gold in the hills, golden soil of marvellous fertility, golden sunshine and a golden civilization that dates back 8,000 years was brought from Panama by the steamer Scribe Elisa, recently arrived at New York.

W. E. Flannagan, of Santa Cruz, Cal., an engineer, who is building the first road through the Panama jungle from San Carlos to Panama City, told the story of this new land, which is a tiny spot in the Panama jungle known as Baquetta, 350 miles from Panama City, inaccessible save by airplane or by a narrow gauge railroad from a tiny unnamed harbor on the Pacific Coast.

"Baquetta is the garden spot of the world," said Mr. Flannagan. "When I was there a few months ago the natives had excavated tombs of their ancestors and found in them remains of a people who evidently had reached a high state of culture. In the tombs were found exquisitely modelled and colored pottery, gold vases, gold bells and gold balls, inside which had been cunningly placed more gold balls. Archaeologists say these things had been buried there 8,000 years ago—5,000 years before the time of the Pharaohs in Egypt.

"The gold still gleamed as if hammered out yesterday, while the pottery flamed with color that was as new as an evening's sunset."

"The gold certainly came from the hillsides near Baquetta, which gave every indication of being gold-bearing country. On one of the hills of the city is a towering cathedral which we learned had been built by the Spaniards early in the sixteenth century. It is a wonderful building. The altars are inlaid with gold, all the vessels are of gold and even the hangings on the walls are of beaten gold.

"The country is inhabited by the San Blas Indians, a superior tribe of people who probably are descendants of the ancient inhabitants. They are red Indians, but unlike most of the present Central American tribes, are clean, wear good clothing and are quite intelligent.

"The country is so fertile they do not have to work hard at all for a living, but in spite of this they have not become indolent. They use their spare time in sports and in the practice of their native art of pottery making.

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