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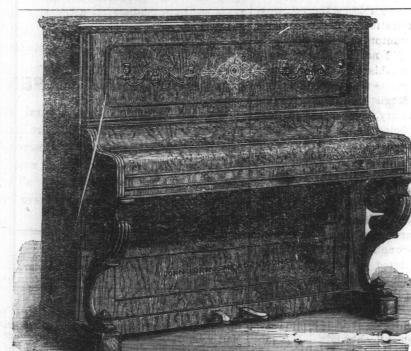
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CHAPTER XIX.

(Continued.)

'If you talk in that way, Margarita,' said Lord Rylestone, gravely, 'I will not think of going away at all. Why, my darling, to win a kingdom I would not leave you, if you take my departure so sorely to heart as this!'

She passed her hand over her brow, as

though she would fain chase away the shadow 'I always talk nonsense in the starlight, she said, with a strange little laugh. 'We will talk about your coming home. I am fright ened at myself to-night-I feel like a man who looks down into the mouth of a yawning gulf and thinks he may fall in. We shall talk about that happy day when you shall come back. I wonder how the sun will rise that day, Allan. I have always loved its light, but it will be brighter than ever to me then. Let me hold both your hands while you tell me all

But he drew her closer to him, and she sat with her head on his breast, and her face raised to his, while she listened to all he said about the future home-coming.

'It is a great thing to have a home like this, he said. 'My heart would not grow as warm at the thought of going back to Walton, as i does at the idea of coming back here. I shall have the picture of our pretty house, buried in its green foliage, as it is, with me wherever I may go. I shall see this window with its frame of roses and passion-flowers, and your fair face, Margarita, fairer than any flowers that ever bloomed, waiting for me here.'

He talked to her until she had in some measure forgotten her dark fancies, and then it was time for rest.

The day of parting came at last, and to Lord Rylestone it was almost a relief. The for his wife's sake, he saw that the sooner it was ended the better. She was growing white and wan, with great dark circles round her eyes, as of one who wept and watched incessantly. When any color came to her face, it was a burning hectic flush. For her sake the parting were better over.

He wondered how he was to leave her. He dreaded the last clinging caress of the dear arms, the last kiss from the tender lips. But that such a thing would have seemed unmanly, he would have given up his purpose rather than endure her sorrow.

How should he leave her? He thought he would conceal the hour of his departure from her and leave her while she slept; that would surely be the most merciful course and cause her the least suffering. She might wish that she could have spoken her last words to him, but it would be more merciful by far to avoid a final leave-taking.

He tried it. He was to sail on the fifteenth of June, and he must be in London on the evening of the fourteenth to meet the Earl of Barton. He did not tell Margarita the precise hour of his departure, although she had questioned him several times about it. Every preparation that love could suggest had been made for him; she had worked almost night and day that he might have everything complete and perfect-there was nothing forgotten. She rose very early on the morning of the fourteenth to finish his packing-she would not allow any strange hand to touch it; and then, when it was all ended, she lay down upon

the couch in her dressing-room to rest. He had guessed that she would do this, and intended to go away while she rested. The carriage was taken round to the back of the house, and quite silently his packages were carried out one after the other. Then he tried to go. Hot tears blinded his eyes. He was a strong man, but he looked around the rooms wherein he had been so happy, and gave vent to a sob which he could not control.

He could not go without looking at her once again-without taking with him a memory of her beautiful face as he had seen it last; so he stole gently into her dressing-room.

Margarita lay on the little couch, and by the carelessness of her attitude, the listless fall of the white arms, he knew that she was exhausted. Her dark head lay on a pillow of crimson velvet, and by contrast the face looked doubly white; there was no vestige of color except the lips that trembled in her sleep. But what touched him most was the fact that she

held in her hands an old glove of his one which he had thrown away, as though she could not sleep without having something near her that had belonged to him.

He was looking at her for the last time for so long—his beautiful wife whom he had loved so tenderly. He pictured to himself the despair in the dark eyes when she should awake and find him gone. He drew nearer to her, wondering if he had been selfish in his love-if it would have been kinder and wiser to remain single until he had in some measure attained his position. And then, being near to her, he must touch her. He knelt down by her side, and, if ever an ardent, earnest prayer rose from any man's heart, one went from his to Heaven. He prayed that she might be well and happy during his absence, and that he might be spared to meet her again.

Not intending to awake her, he bent down and kissed the sweet white face. He started, for the dark eyes were looking into his own. the pale face grew crimson.

'Allan,' she said, quietly, 'you are goingand you meant to go away without telling me. 'I thought it would be more merciful to

you,' he explained, gently. 'It would have killed me to wake and find you gone. You are going, Allan!'

'Yes, my darling, my sweet wife; you must be brave now-it is time for us to part.' ' And you were kneeling by my side, pray-

ing, dear?' she continued, 'Ah, well! say good-by to me now.' He kissed her lips, sobbing, despite his self-

control, as bitterly as a child. He spoke no word except 'Good-by, my love, good-by,' and then the dark eyes closed, and he knew that a merciful oblivion had come to her for

He did not dare to linger-it was far better so, he said to himself; waking could bring her only misery. He turned away, leaving her dead for a time to her sorrow.

He looked around when he stood in the pretty grounds, bidding a long, silent adieu to the house where he had been so happy; and then, raising his hat from his head, he stood for one minute under the tress.

'I pray Heaven,' he said aloud, 'that I may find all as well when I return as I leave it now, and my wife's sweet face watching for me where last evening we sat and talked together.'

CHAPTER XX.

LADY RYLESTONE awoke from her stupor to the keen anguish of the knowledge that her husband was gone. She went up to her room, and carefully closed the door, that she might give full vent to her grief alone.

There was no human eye to see her as she flung herself on the ground unable to stand while that terrible pain rent her heart. She had been one of the most devoted of wives; but now, as she lay there, with great waves of anguish rolling over her, she remembered a hundred things that she might have done for Allan, a hundred kind words that she might have said

It was, as she had previously expressed herself to him, as though her soul had been cut in twain. While she lived, Margarita never forgot the agony of that hour. Presently the reaction came. Her vitality, her physical activity, were too great to allow her to remain long in that trance of sorrow. She had to bear the pain of his absence, and it must be borne. The dreary time would come to an end, and she must live through it. She knew that the only thing which could bring her relief was resignation.

She thought of many ways in which she could make the time pass until he came back and then she smiled sadly to think how soon she had begun to reckon on that. He had not left English shores yet. When he came back he would wish her to live very differently. She would be to read the best books of all kindsshe might fit herself to take the position he desired her to occupy, and to do full justice to it. She would spend her time in reading, she would get together such a store of knowledge and information as should delight her husband, and make her useful to him.

Lord Rylestone had hardly reached London when his unhappy young wife had begun to think what she could do to please him on his return. 'His return'-she said the words over to herself as she went to the open window to let the cool air play upon her heated face and burning eyes. 'His return'—a cold shudder came over her as she repeated the words, and it was not the scent-laden summer air that caused it. 'His return'-a cold, sudden fear that had no name and could not be told in words came over her-a presentiment. the cold chill of sudden dread.

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