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The Web;

OR,

TRUE LOVE'S PASSION.

CHAPTER XXIII.

An Entangling Web.

"Thank you, yes," replied Lady Norah, gravely, and trying to decide whether she should tell him of their quest; but, as if he had divined her indecision, he said, quietly:

"Is anything the matter, Lady Norah?"

Norah forced a smile, but avoided his eyes.

"Well, yes," she said. "We are looking for Becca South, Mr. Berton. His eyes did not quail, and not a muscle of his face winced, as, still smiling, he said:

"Not a very difficult search, is it? Your maid is very well known, is she not?"

"Yes," said Norah, constrainedly, for she felt that he was thinking of last night, and the scene between Cyril and Becca, "and that makes it difficult. Harman—her aunt—is afraid that she did not return to Santeigh last night."

"No!" he responded, raising his brows. "But there is nothing very alarming in that, is there, Mrs. Harman? She may have stayed at Ferndale."

"Oh, we have thought of that," said Norah, almost impatiently. Guildford Berton's presence made the affair still more distasteful to her, and she began to regret that she had not sent Harman alone to make inquiries.

"Of course," he said, "forgive me; but the last person on the scene always makes suggestions which have occurred to others at the beginning. When did you see her last, Mrs. Harman?"

"When she started for the fete, sir," replied Harman, almost inaudibly.

"Ah, yes," he murmured, glancing at Norah, who sat looking straight in front of her. "Of course, you were not there yourself, Mrs. Harman? Well, don't look so anxious; I have no doubt we shall soon find your niece. Let me see—" He seemed to consider for a moment or two.

"Why, yes, of course, the thing to do is to find out the person who saw her last. No doubt some one left the fete and walked home with her."

He made the suggestion so cheerfully and encouragingly that Harman

gave him a grateful look from his anxious eyes.

"I will help you to find her," he said. Then he turned to Norah: "Pray don't trouble about it, Lady Norah. I am sure there is no need for anxiety. I will make some inquiries of the people who were at the fete yesterday. The girl is well known, and I dare say dozens of her friends know where she is."

Norah inclined her head with a constrained "Thank you," and turned the ponies, but walked them slowly, and he kept by the side with his hand resting on the phaeton.

The village street, usually so sleepy and inert, was alive with groups who looked at the Court carriage, and discussed the one topic of the day—the disappearance of Becca. They guessed from Harman's accompanying her that Norah was looking for the missing girl, and as they touched their caps and courtesies one and another expressed their approval.

"Her ladyship's got a tender heart," said one old woman. "She's one of the first to be after the girl. And there's Mr. Berton, too. I'll be bound he'll find her if any one can!"

Norah looked at the people with the same half-absent, half-troubled expression. The vague, indefinable fear or presentiment was weighing upon her more heavily each minute. Suddenly she pulled up the ponies.

"There are some girls—those standing outside the inn—whom I saw at the fete. Will you ask them if they know anything, please?" she said.

Guildford Berton walked to the knot of girls, the phaeton following.

"Can any of you tell Lady Norah where Becca South is?" he asked.

They looked at each other silently and shyly, and shook their heads.

"You were at the fete last night," said Norah. "Did none of you see her when you were coming away?"

The girls looked at one of the party and whispered to her, evidently urging her to speak; and she stepped forward a little and dropped a courtesy. It was the girl who had wished Becca good-night as Cyril was writing the letter.

"I saw Becca last of any one, my lady," she said, timidly.

Guildford Berton shot a swift glance at her, then looked at the ground with an impassive countenance.

"Yes!" said Norah, gently and encouragingly. "Will you tell us when and where you saw her?"

"It was when I was coming away from the big tent, my lady. Becca was coming away, too. She was standing

just a little away from the tent, near the shrubbery."

Norah leaned forward eagerly, and Harman sat with clasped hands and an anxious look on her face, but Guildford Berton stood grave and impassively cool.

"She was coming away, coming home?" said Norah. "Why did she not come with you?"

The girl looked down.

"I don't know, my lady. I did not think of asking her, but—" She stopped.

"Was she alone?" asked Guildford Berton, and his voice was quietly sympathetic, nothing more.

"No, sir," replied the girl. "There was a gentleman with her."

"A gentleman!" he said. "Who was it? Do you know him?" Then he turned with an encouraging smile to Norah. "We shall find her now."

The girl hesitated slightly, and looked down at the ground.

"It was Mr. Cyril Burne, my lady," she said.

Norah's hands involuntarily tightened on the reins, and the ponies, taking it as the signal for starting, plunged forward; but she pulled them up instantly, and looked at the girl steadily, though she felt a thrill run through her.

"Are—are you sure?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, my lady, quite sure. There was a streak of light where they were, and I saw him quite plainly. Oh, I am quite sure it was the artist gentleman."

Norah sat with tightly compressed lips, looking before her, and there was a moment's silence.

Guildford Berton broke it.

"That does not help us much," he said to her in a low voice. "Mr. Burne may have been helping her with her cloak; he was very attentive to her all the evening."

A faint dash of color rose to Norah's face, but she made no response.

"Did no one see her after that?" he asked of the group generally.

The girls shook their heads and murmured.

"No, sir, no, my lady, none of us saw her after that."

"Perhaps we had better ask Mr. Burne?" he said to Norah in the same low voice. "I don't suppose he can give us any information, but we will leave no stone unturned."

Norah inclined her head slightly, and he went up to the inn door. As he did so an elderly man with bushy eyebrows came out. It was Mr. Furlong. He was filling his pipe, and glanced at the group, and then at the phaeton; his eyes rested upon Norah's face with intensity, and he stopped the filling of his pipe. Then he touched his hat, half-lifting it in London fashion, and going to a bench outside the inn, sat down, and leisurely lit his pipe, and sat smoking, apparently paying little attention to what was going on.

Guildford Berton glanced at him half-curiously, and was entering the inn door, when Mrs. Brown appeared. She looked furtive and upset, and dropped a succession of courtesies to Norah.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Brown," said Guildford Berton. "Is Mr. Burne in?"

"Mr. Burne, sir?" she replied. "Oh, no, sir; he's not here. He hasn't been home all night."

Guildford Berton gave a little start, and looked over his shoulder at Norah.

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"Mr. Burne did not stay at Ferndale Park," she said, and her voice sounded strangely in her own ears.

"Then where can he have gone, my lady?" continued Mrs. Brown, as if she were laboring under a sense of personal injury. "It's true as he's rather a strange gentleman, a-rushing off as you may say, without a word of warning; but he wouldn't go up to London in his dancing things, would he, my lady?"

Norah did not reply, but Guildford Berton nodded.

"Just so, Mrs. Brown; as you say, that is not very likely. But I don't quite see where he could have stayed the night."

"If he'd stayed at the inn at Ferndale—but, Lor, sir, it's a rough place, and Mr. Cyril Burne wouldn't have thought anything of walking home here. No, he wouldn't have stayed there, and if he had he'd have come back this morning, if only to change his things."

Guildford Berton went up to the phaeton and leaned on it.

"It is very—curious," he said, thoughtfully, as if he were beginning to get puzzled. "Really, I think Mr. Burne's disappearance as remarkable as Becca South's."

The group had become considerably augmented by this time, and they all listened in eager interest to the proceedings.

"You have not seen Becca South this morning?" asked Guildford Berton of Mrs. Brown, and she seemed quite hurt by the question.

"Lor, no, sir! Beggin' your pardon, I should think I've been asked that at least a hundred times. I didn't see her all yesterday. I don't see her often on the best of days. The last time I saw her, I think—she paused a moment—"at least so far as I can remember, was the day, Mr. Cyril started for London. She came with a message from him to fetch his watch, as he'd left behind."

At this fresh link of connection between Cyril's movements and Becca's, Norah's face flushed, and she bent down to hide it, and arranged the fur wrap at her feet.

"This deserves to be called the Santeigh Mystery," said Guildford Berton to her with a smile. "Really, I don't know what to do next, unless we inquire at the railway station."

Norah gathered the reins in her hand.

"But pray don't you trouble to do so," he said, quickly. "I will get my horse and ride over."

(To be Continued.)

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This week at A. & S. Rodger's

TO-DAY'S Messages.

10.30 A.M.

BUCHAREST.
BERLIN, To-day. Bucharest was a gay Capital in peace times with a population of nearly 300,000 and frequently alluded to as the Paris of the East. It covers an area in excess of twenty square miles, containing the royal residence, government buildings and other notable structures. It is the centre of a considerable trade.

GERMAN SUBS SHELL FUNCHAL, MADEIRA.

LONDON, To-day. The French gunboat "Surprise" was sunk by German submarines off Funchal, in Madeira, according to an announcement by the Portuguese Minister of Marine in a wireless despatch received from Lisbon. 74 of the crew were torpedoed, according to the despatch. An Exchange Telegraph from Lisbon says that news received from Madeira says that 34 persons were killed in the bombardment of Funchal. The submarine shelled the shore for two hours, especially the English cable station and other public buildings. Only small damage was done. The steamers Kangaroo and Daira were torpedoed.

LABORITES REGRET PARLIAMENTARY CRISIS.

LONDON, To-day. That the Laborites are not likely to support Lloyd George's Administration was further indicated at a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee of Trades Unions to-day, which adopted a resolution unanimously expressing its profound regret that certain statesmen influenced by the "Peace Campaign," have, in the hour of the nation's crisis entirely failed to observe that loyalty and self-sacrifice which they repeatedly urged upon the workmen during the war. The resolution continues further: "We earnestly hope the present unsatisfactory state amongst those entrusted with great responsibilities shall immediately cease so as to set a better example to workers."

LOYD GEORGE TO FORM MINISTRY.

LONDON, To-day. A Court circular to-night announcing political audiences and conferences at the Palace to-day adds: "The King gave a further audience to-night evening to Bonnet Law, who intimated that he was unable to form an Administration. The King summoned Lloyd George, who at His Majesty's request undertook to endeavour to form an administration."

DEPLORABLE ACCIDENT KILLS WOMEN.

LONDON, To-day. Twenty-six women were killed and about 30 injured by an explosion in a munitions factory last night, according to an official announcement which adds that the effect of the accident upon munitions output will be negligible.

GOVERNMENT TO TAKE OVER LAND.

LONDON, To-day. In order the better to secure a food supply King George has signed an Order-in-Council empowering the Board of Agriculture to take over unoccupied or occupied land for the purpose of cultivation.

A NATIONAL MINISTRY.

LONDON, To-day. The Press Association says it hears that on Bonnet Law's advice King George asked Lloyd George to form a Government, and that it understands on good authority that Lloyd George will endeavour to form a National Ministry without regard to party differences.

LOD DERBY'S SENSIBLE WORDS.

LONDON, To-day. Lord Derby, speaking at a public meeting yesterday, said he would have nothing to do with intrigue, if it existed. Lord Derby made a strong appeal to conflicting Ministers to sink their differences. To go back to Party Administration, he said, would spell ruin for this Country. "It is too much to ask for reciprocal consideration? I want the best men of all parties. I feel it will arouse an echo here probably in the country if we appeal to men even at this eleventh hour to sink their differences under perhaps a new Leadership, and give us still the best men of both sides for the proper carrying on of the war."

ATHENS IS AN ANXIOUS CONDITION.

PARIS, To-day. A Havas despatch from Athens says the entire French colony left Athens yesterday. The foreign colonies no longer all the British at Piraeus. Many have embarked on vessels in the harbor. Athens is apparently calm, continues the despatch, but the population are much impressed by the excess of foreigners and are in a great state of anxiety. Arrests of the supporters of former Premier Venizelos and searches of their residences continue, while the Venizelists organs no longer appear. A barrier is raised the streets and guarded by Royal regular troops, augmented by the voluntary enrolment of reservists. The Senate Ministers have been looking after the departure of their national At Johnina the officers of the garrison, aided by reservists, have arrested Venizelos supporters.

DIDN'T KNOW THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT ATHENS.

LONDON, To-day. The Foreign Office has issued a statement to the effect that there is no reason to believe that the press makes do not give an accurate picture of the actual situation at Athens.

The Question is—What is Friendship? By Dorgan.



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