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HILDA; OR, THE MERCHANT'S SECRET.

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CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

"It is hardly credible that Grant is her third husband. Her second husband was an old man who left her a large fortune; was it not so?" asked Hilda.

"Yes, and that fortune will be Frank's at her death. Don't you think he will be a good part, Hilda, worth captivating when he is older?"

"And you mean to try and win him and his fortune, I suppose, but I would advise you never to marry for money, Therèse," and Hilda sighed, while a painful reminiscence clouded her young face.

A short silence now ensued; at length it was broken by Therèse.

"Will you not decide upon making your debut in society to-night, Hilda," she asked persuasively.

"I think I shall. I feel some curiosity to see this English baronet. I knew an officer in the — regiment in Kingston, whose name was Montague, and I think he and Sir Gervase are the same person."

"Very probable. Sir Gervase is in that regiment."

"How did the acquaintance with him commence, Therèse?" inquired Hilda.

"Claribel met him at one of Pauline's select parties. The next day he made a morning call, and he sent him an invitation to this dinner-party."

"And where did you see him, Therèse?"

"Last week at the review at Logan's Farm. He was well mounted and caracolled so gracefully I couldn't keep my eyes off him. You know I was allowed to go to the review, although Claribel opposed it. It was my birthday, and he did not like to refuse."

"And how old are you now, Therèse?"

"Just sixteen, and I think ma might let me 'come out,' but she will not on Claribel's account."

"You think she is afraid you would eclipse Claribel," observed Hilda, with an arch smile.

"Yes, Claribel is not as pretty as I am," said the young beauty, proudly throwing back her auburn curls from her Hebe-like face.

"What a vain girl you are! Who has been giving you this information?"

"My glass! Haven't I eyes? Girls are not children now-a-days."

"It would be well if girls of your age were more child-like," said Hilda gravely. "You want to be a woman too soon, Therèse. You are yet too young to mix in the world. Aunt Berkeley is quite right to keep you in the nursery till you have more sense. It is well for you that your way is hedged about that you are kept in safety within the precincts of a happy home, from that world which you long so much to enter!" And Hilda sighed as she thought of her own miserable girlhood. What a contrast between the early years of these two cousins!

"If you are to appear at dinner to-day, Hilda, what are you going to wear," asked Therèse, abruptly changing the conversation. "It won't do to wear mourning. You had better let me help you to select something becoming. I am anxious to see how you will look in colours. You have worn that black dress so long that the gloom associated with you is oppressive."

"I have a silver poplin, how would that suit?"

"You have a rich mauve silk that will do better; that, with your handsome jet ornaments, will look superb. And you must allow me to arrange your hair in the present most approved fashion, frizzed all over, with a chignon of immense dimensions."

"No, thank you, Therèse. I prefer arranging my hair in a more becoming and natural style."

"But wearing the hair as I advise gives a stylish appearance," persisted Therèse, "and it is so fashionable!"

"I shall never follow any absurdity in dress although it is the fashion."

"Then you may as well live out of the world as out of the fashion, Hilda; but I suppose you will do as you please. However, you will look elegant in any style of dress; that is some comfort, and I do want you to look captivating to-night. Now I must go into the conservatory and get a white rose that, with some geranium leaves, will look tasteful and contrast charmingly with your raven hair."

"You are very kind to give yourself so much trouble, Therèse," said Hilda gratefully.

"Did I not say I wanted you to look irresistible and captivate Sir Gervase Montague," remarked her young cousin as she left the room.

As Mrs. Grant Berkeley will be one of the principal characters in this story we think it necessary to relate some incidents of her early life before introducing her with the other guests at Mr. Berkeley's dinner-party.

CHAPTER X.

PAULINE FALKNER.

It was Sunday night in Montreal—a night in the depth of winter, bitterly cold but fine and starlit, the myriads of gems in the ebon vault sparkling with intense brilliancy through the frosty air. In the stillness of the Sabbath night, sounding distinctly through the clear atmosphere, rung out the bells of the different churches, summoning with solemn peal the thousands of human beings within the populous city to worship in the temples of the Most High. Few, comparatively speaking, answered to the solemn call, and on the ear of the many fell unheeded the varied chimes calling them away for a time from the too engrossing cares and vanities of life.

In a richly-furnished room in a handsome residence in St. Antoine street, sat a fashionably-dressed young lady, indolently reclining on a low rocking-chair before a coal-fire burning brightly in a handsome grate. An open bible lay on a rosewood-stand beside her, but she was not reading now; she was looking dreamily on the burning mass of coals within the burnished grate, as if watching the bright jets of flame which burst forth from time to time, glaring with such fitful brilliancy. Suddenly the door-bell rang violently. The young girl, roused from her reverie, listened eagerly to the unexpected sound. A moment afterwards a light step was heard bounding up the stairs; the door opened, and a very handsome girl entered.

"What! not yet ready, Edith? Are you not going to St. George's to-night?" she asked in surprise.

"No; the weather is so cold I feel unwilling to go out. I was at church this morning, and feel no inclination to go again; there is nothing to tempt me out such a freezing night."

"Then you do not know that a stranger from Toronto will preach at St. George's to-night, the Rev. Mr. Castonell, an eloquent preacher and a handsome young man. I would not miss hearing him for the world! I am such an admirer of pulpit oratory. Really, Edith, you must come; I cannot go alone, and I depended on your driving me to church this cold night."

"Then your aunt is not going. I thought she went to church in all kinds of weather."

"So she does, but to-night she went to hear a converted Jew hold forth in some Wesleyan Chapel. I would not go to hear the old Hebrew. I have no sympathy with the Jewish race. It is, I suppose, because I hear so much about their conversion. Aunt Gordon is positively crazed on that point. I shouldn't wonder if she would marry this old Jew and leave him all her money."

"That would be unfortunate for you, Pauline," said Edith, smiling.

"So it would! but let us not borrow trouble. Sufficient to the day is the evil! That's my maxim!"

"And a very sensible one it is. But about my going to St. George's Church to-night, I am afraid it is too late to think of it now, Pauline."

"Certainly not! We can drive there in a few minutes, and if we are late so much the better; our entrance then will not pass unnoticed. You really must not stay moping at home. I wonder you would think of it. It is so much pleasanter spending the evening in a crowded church, seeing and being seen. I never miss the night service. It is almost the same as going to the Opera—the fashionably-dressed throng, the brilliant light, the delightful music, make it quite a place of enjoyment."

"It is well your aunt does not hear you speak of church and its solemn service in that irreverent way, Pauline," said Edith reprovingly. "She would be quite shocked, and not without reason."

"Oh, I know I am very wicked! And yet are there not many who look upon the evening service in a fashionable church in no holier light than I do?"

"I am afraid your observation is too true, but listen! positively the bell has stopped ringing!"

"Not there! it begins again. It will ring for five minutes; you can be ready in that time, and do not forget your purse. Mr. Castonell is to preach in aid of some charitable institution, and remember something handsome will be expected from Miss Harrington, the heiress."

"I suppose I must give for you as well as myself," said Edith, smiling as she left the room, requesting Pauline to ring and order the sleigh to the door immediately.

In a short time she returned, wrapped in costly furs to protect her from the intense cold. A moment afterwards and the two friends were seated in Mr. Harrington's luxurious sleigh, borne by the spirited horses

rapidly towards St. George's Church. Although the bell had ceased ringing for some minutes when the sleigh drew up before the entrance, there was yet a stream of well-dressed people pouring into the sacred building with as much *empressement* to hear the eloquent preacher as if they were going to a place of amusement. The service had commenced as Edith Harrington and Pauline Falkner, with some other fashionable worshippers, swept up the principal aisle. It was the familiar voice of Dr. — which Edith heard as she entered the church, but as she reached her pew she perceived a white-robed figure in the chancel, whom she supposed was Mr. Castonell.

A man of interesting appearance he certainly was. A figure tall and dignified, features finely cut, the complexion pale, the eyes dark, glowing with intellectual light. When he ascended the pulpit every eye was turned admiringly towards him, every ear listened with pleasure to the full, rich tones of his voice. His discourse was eloquent—its subject the worth of an immortal soul. He spoke of life, its vanities, its fleeting joys, its carking cares. He denounced the worship of riches—the Babel of the present day—spoke of the soul-destroying influence of worldly pursuits, the selfishness of prosperity, its hardening power making men and women indifferent to the sufferings of their fellow-creatures. Many a worldly-minded man in that large congregation was moved by these words of truth, so fearlessly spoken, and under the softening influence of the hour the collection taken up for the purpose advocated by the gifted preacher was unusually large. Miss Harrington and her friend listened with delight to the eloquent discourse, and as they drove home they spoke in raptures of the handsome stranger. Edith was deeply impressed by the beautiful sermon, the more worldly-minded Pauline laughed at these impressions.

"It is Mr. Castonell's splendid eyes which give his words so much weight, depend upon it, Edith," she said. "If he were not so handsome you would have listened to him unmoved."

"But what he did say was so true," urged Edith. "Just to think how I have squandered money—spent so much on selfish gratifications!"

"My conscience is easy on that head. Unfortunately I had no money to squander," said Pauline, laughing.

"I wonder if Mr. Castonell is as good as he looks," said Miss Harrington.

"I shouldn't wonder if he was a hypocrite," observed Pauline. "I always suspect a handsome saint. I think a clerical Adonis is just as vain and conceited as any other man. It is not because he wears a black coat and white cravat that he should be different from others."

"Oh, Pauline! after such a sermon can you doubt Mr. Castonell's goodness?"

"Well, I must confess I do feel inclined to think well of him. Did he not look angelic when in concluding the sermon he lifted his magnificent eyes to Heaven, raising one white hand so gracefully. I wonder if that attitude is studied. I fancy it cost him some hours' practice before the glass."

"Really, Pauline, you are incorrigible. There is no danger of your falling in love with him, and so much the better; you would not do for a clergyman's wife."

"And wherefore, *ma chère amie*," asked Miss Falkner, with some annoyance in her tones.

"Because you are not at all religious. You even ridicule those who are."

"Those who pretend to be what they are not! Such as Aunt Gordon for instance."

"Pauline! how can you speak so of one who has been a mother to you?" asked Edith reprovingly.

"Well, I am grateful to her for that, but I cannot be blind to her faults. You know how crabbed and uncharitable she is, frowning on all the innocent amusements of youth as if gossip and scandal were not really worse than balls and dancing!"

"Do you know what stay Mr. Castonell is going to make in Montreal," asked Edith, after a short silence.

"He intends to remain some days. He is staying at Mrs. Frazer's, who is a relative of his, and, by the way, she intends to give a religious party to-morrow night. Aunt Gordon, who is her particular friend, is going."

"Could you manage to procure an invitation for yourself and me," was Edith's eager question.

"Aunt could do so, if she were so obliging, and when she knows that you are particularly anxious to meet Mr. Castonell," added Pauline smiling archly, "I have no doubt she will."

They had now reached Miss Gordon's house, and the young friends separated. Miss Harrington, as she drove home the rest of the way alone, allowing her thoughts to dwell uninterruptedly on Mr. Castonell.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HEIRESS.

An invitation to Mrs. Frazer's party was easily obtained for Miss Gordon's niece and Edith Harrington. Both girls were particularly anxious to look well on this particular night, for both were desirous to captivate the handsome stranger, in whom each felt a deeper interest than she cared to acknowledge.

Edith Harrington was an heiress, but no beauty—very seldom are rare personal attractions combined with golden charms. The beautiful and the gifted are rarely among the favoured children of fortune. Very often in the crowded thoroughfares, borne along by spirited horses, may be seen reclining in an elegant chariot some dumpy figure elaborately got up, the vulgar face looking out from an exquisite Parisian bonnet, while on the sidewalk an elegant looking woman walks wearily along plainly dressed and unnoticed.

Edith, though not handsome, was lady-like, and her pale plain face had a very sweet expression. Pauline Falkner was really beautiful—a brilliant brunette, fascinating and elegant-looking even in the simplest costume. The contrast between these two girls, as they entered Mrs. Frazer's drawing-room, was striking—the heiress richly attired, glittering in jewels—Pauline plainly dressed, yet dazzling by her brilliant beauty. The eyes of Mr. Castonell were soon attracted by the beautiful face, and he requested an introduction to Miss Falkner. From the quiet corner where Edith sat unnoticed—at least unnoticed by the cynosure of the evening, the handsome clergyman—she watched with jealous eyes the flirtation which now ensued, for the clerical Adonis could flirt, and Pauline brought all her powers of fascination to bear upon his heart, determined to secure the prize. She succeeded admirably, for she was an experienced coquette, possessing a witchery of manner which was irresistible. Poor Edith was in despair. She had not yet won even a passing glance from Mr. Castonell. He prided himself on being a connoisseur in beauty, and such a plain face had no attractions for his critical eye. The evening wore on pleasantly for most of the guests, but wearily for the heiress.

At a late hour the party broke up. Pauline declined her young friend's offer to drive her home. She preferred walking and a moonlight tête-à-tête with her new admirer. Mr. Castonell's stay in Montreal was prolonged. At the house of Mrs. Frazer he frequently met Miss Falkner. His attentions to her were very marked, and Pauline flattered herself she had won his affections, when suddenly all these bright hopes were blighted—these charming illusions dispelled.

One day when Pauline was driving with Miss Harrington through the crowded thoroughfare of Notre Dame street they met Mr. Castonell. The very elegant equipage attracted his attention, and he inquired of Mrs. Frazer—with whom he was walking—to whom it belonged. The answer, Miss Harrington, an heiress worth several hundred thousand dollars, fell rather startling on his ear, giving rise instantly to a new train of thought.

"Then that plain-looking girl seated beside Miss Falkner in that handsome sleigh was an heiress; what a pity he had not known this before! A rich wife would be very desirable for a poor clergyman. If he only could win her!" And when he thought of his own very attractive appearance the thought did not seem impossible. But then he must give up his pleasant flirtation with Pauline. He really did admire her intensely, and she, poor girl, loved him, he was afraid. If she only were the heiress, how very delightful it would be to get her for a wife, but she was penniless, as poor as himself, and he could not afford to marry for love.

Mr. Castonell, notwithstanding his eloquent preaching, his grave deportment and spiritual imaginings, was worldly-minded,—the idols of earth though often loftily denounced from the pulpit, were enshrined in his own heart, the sanctimonious deportment was only assumed.

That evening at Miss Gordon's house Edith Harrington again met Mr. Castonell. He soon procured an introduction and devoted himself to the task of winning the heiress. Pauline Falkner looked on apparently unmoved. She had sufficient tact to hide her anger and mortification, and quite enough knowledge of human nature to understand the cause of this desertion. From that moment she felt that Edith's gold had won the heart of Mr. Castonell, raising up a glittering barrier between herself and him. This was no small disappointment, calmly as it was borne, for a passion as violent as it was sudden had been awakened in the girl's heart by this gifted and fascinating man.

To win the affections of the heiress was not a difficult matter, but to gain her father's consent to the marriage was not so easy. The old gentleman was quite indignant at the poor clergyman's presumption in aspiring to the hand of his daughter. He had sufficient insight into character to see that it was Edith's fortune, not herself, that had captivated the hypocritical worldling. He did not withhold his consent to her marriage, but he gave Mr. Castonell to understand that he should receive no dower with his wife—the small sum of one thousand pounds was all she possessed in her own right—the large fortune she expected from him would be withheld; not one dollar of it should go to enrich a son-in-law who was not of his choosing.

The marriage took place, Mr. Castonell fully persuaded that Mr. Harrington's anger would wear itself out and that he should eventually possess the fortune he coveted. But year after year passed without the longed-for recom-