

The Golden Jubilee of our Holy Father Pope Leo XIII.

Golden in the light of golden beams... Golden in the light of golden beams... Golden in the light of golden beams...

Laura Desmond's Choice.

BY AGNES M. STEWART.

PART II.

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

To the rage and mortification of his widowed mother, her only son, Tom, had run away with her maid, whom he married some six months later.

These, suddenly, the return of her husband rushed upon her mind, and with the recollection, a return of the temptation which had beset her on the previous night.

She dressed herself mechanically, and was seated at the breakfast-table when she was roused by the postman's knock.

A moment later the servant placed a letter on the table.

Martha took it in her hand and gazed at it as if spell-bound. The hand-writing was that of Edwin Ansell.

She saw by the postmark that he had returned to Riverdale.

"My CHARMING MOTHER, I am sorry not to be able to keep my promise of attending you to Marylebone Church; but a telegram from my precious sister-in-law announcing the sudden illness of my mother, compels me to travel here by express yesterday afternoon; nevertheless, what is of necessity delayed need not be accounted as not done at all.

On arriving at Wellington street she took her place in one of the little red omnibuses which ply so far from the station, rather than run the risk of being trodden by hooked cabs; and on reaching the station booked by express to Yeovil, intending, for safety sake, to halt at that town, instead of looking through to Exeter, which was but a few miles from Riverdale.

CHAPTER VIII. FROM YEOVIL TO EXETER. Two passengers traveled in a second-class carriage; one a young and beautiful girl, with a skin of the hue of rose, and a cheek with the tint of a peach blossom, hair that rippled in the sunshine like threads of gold, and such a world of animation in the lovely straight features, as to remove all charge of insipidity. Her companion was the woman Martha, but unlike the Martha who booked from Waterloo to Yeovil some six weeks ago.

She had been suddenly seized with illness during her short three hours' stay in the former place, and what she mistook for a passing indisposition proved to be an attack of nervous fever from which she was now sufficiently recovered to travel.

The lovely ride from Yeovil to Exeter had been nearly half accomplished, and the young lady, sympathizing with her fellow-traveller's sickly appearance, had tried, but in vain, to beguile her with conversation.

Reluctantly, when about to win away that time by brooding, she had thrown violently forward against the vacant seat opposite, the train had come to a stop, and as she availed herself, she was sensible by the agonizing cries that rent the air that a collision had taken place. When she opened her eyes she found herself seated in a street-car, a gentleman leaning over her, and holding her head and shoulders, and she was conscious that she had been in a collision with a street-car, and she was sensible by the agonizing cries that rent the air that a collision had taken place.

And dress; tell me if you feel in any pain?

"No, I do not, only a little tired. I am a surgeon's daughter and know how to bind up a wound, but let me try and be of use to those less fortunate; where is the person that was in the carriage along with me?"

"Not far off," said the doctor, who had been watching this girl, whose complexion naturally, like a wild rose, was fast fading; her eyes, her soft fair hair, her violet blue eyes, and her delicately fragile figure had attracted his attention. "And so you are a surgeon's daughter, are you?" he asked.

"And I have no doubt you will not faint at the sight of blood, but be as helpful as a Sister of Charity. It is only the fright of the collision that made you insensible. Come with me, I shall be glad of your help."

And, so, Ella Lester, for she it was on her way to a friend of her father's in Exeter, who had invited her to her home in order to do her best to eradicate the image of Edward Bunsell from the girl's heart, arose and accompanied the doctor to the spot a short distance off, where Martha was stretched out, her head resting on one of her arms, her face pale and her eyes closed.

"The scene was terrible enough. Not far away lay the bodies of the dead, and by one they were with difficulty dragged from the debris of two third-class carriages which were a perfect wreck, and all around her lay the wounded and the dying."

"This poor woman is badly hurt," said he as he began to dress the wound on her forehead, whilst Ella on her knees beside the sufferer held up her head; after the bandage had been fastened over the wound, he proceeded to see the broken arm during which operation Martha regained consciousness.

Questioned whether she was going to the hospital, where Martha was stretched out, her head resting on one of her arms, her face pale and her eyes closed.

"It will be impossible for you to travel thither to-night," said the surgeon; "a few persons who have means to pay for the requisite attendance will be received, I believe, in a house close by. Would you like to go there till you hear from your friends?"

Martha nodded assent, and recognizing in the young lady who still rested her head on her bosom, and with her disengaged hand moistened her parched lips, her face fellow-passenger to whom she had given a few curt replies to well meant words of sympathy, she looked the gratitude she had not strength to put into words.

"I will write to your friends," said Ella gently; "and as I shall send a telegram to Exeter to tell those who are expecting me that I shall not be a few hours. Did you not say you were proceeding to Riverdale? I will stay with her, sir, till it is necessary to proceed to some hotel in which I must rest for the night, and will see that she wants for nothing."

"You shall go to no hotel, young lady," said the doctor, handing her his card, on which was engraved the name of Charles Lawford, surgeon. "My wife will be truly glad to receive you, and you must be our guest for at least a few hours. Did you not say you were proceeding to Riverdale? I will stay with her, sir, till it is necessary to proceed to some hotel in which I must rest for the night, and will see that she wants for nothing."

"Indeed," said the doctor; "I am acquainted with the Squire, having attended him lately for a friend of mine who was taking his holiday. Well, now keep very quiet; your case, though bad, is not one of the most serious, supposing that you have no internal injury, and that this young lady will, I know, see that you have all you require, and in the evening, if added, now speaking to Ella, Mrs. Lawford shall come and fetch you to our house."

Then Martha was, by the doctor's directions, conveyed to a small inn hard by the station, and she was placed in a clean and comfortable bed, beside which Ella watched, administering to her the soothing draught, adjusting the pillow beneath the aching head, and tendering many other services until her place should be supplied later by a nurse. And whilst sitting beside Martha's bed, Ella, all unconscious of the fact that had once met and loved, and tendered many other services until her place should be supplied later by a nurse. And whilst sitting beside Martha's bed, Ella, all unconscious of the fact that had once met and loved, and tendered many other services until her place should be supplied later by a nurse.

At the time he had named to Ella, Mr. Lawford arrived with his wife, a tall, slender lady, with black hair and blue eyes, and a clear pale complexion. Her frank and amiable manner won immediately the younger lady, and before she had reached the home of those who were sister strangers to her, she felt as if they were old friends.

And seated with them in the dim twilight of the evening hour, they talked over the awful scenes in which Ella and Mr. Lawford had made each other's acquaintances, and diverse speculations were hazarded as to whether Mrs. Ansell would not come immediately to see the woman now lying suffering at the inn, and conjectures as to the position it was possible she held at Riverdale.

Over-fatigue and excitement kept Ella awake until the early summer sun had risen, and she lay up asleep when aroused by a knock at her chamber-door at eight o'clock on the following morning.

For a moment she stared around her in a sort of bewilderment, till the terrible scene of the previous day rushed upon her memory, and she again closed up with grateful heart a thanksgiving to God that she had not been crushed to death like those whose bleeding corpses she had seen; and the remembrance of what she had now turned her face to the spot where she lay, and she felt as if she were in a street-car, a gentleman leaning over her, and holding her head and shoulders, and she was conscious that she had been in a collision with a street-car, and she was sensible by the agonizing cries that rent the air that a collision had taken place.

"The shock has been too much for you, and the excitement of the scene you passed through yesterday has thoroughly upset you. You must on no account go to Exeter to-day, nor to-morrow either; no, positively not; be contented, as you are, and rest; you can have every comfort with us. I shall prescribe another card to telegram to your parents and another to Mrs. Ansell in case, by any cross accident, that lady should take it into her head to visit you on her way through Exeter, where she will naturally suppose you to be."

And in virtue of his profession, which empowered him to be the best judge of what was right, Ella assented to the request. Her indignation was but a temporary matter, he argued; still she had received a great shock, and rest and quiet would be very beneficial to her.

We need scarcely add that she had written a long and explanatory letter to her father after the telegram had been dispatched, in order to relieve his mind and that of her mother from any anxiety they might be suffering on her account; and it was drawing towards the afternoon of the second day of her stay at Mr. Lawford's house, which she was about to leave in the evening in order to proceed to that of her mother's friend at Exeter, when a brougham drove up to the house, eliciting from her hostess a wondering remark as to who the lady might be who was now walking up the garden that separated it from the high road.

The servant entered with a card, on which was engraved the words "Mrs. Ansell, Riverdale."

"Pray do not leave the room, Miss Lester," said Mrs. Lawford, as Ella moved towards the door with that intention, and Laura came forward.

"The lady who is coming to see you," said she, "is Mrs. Ansell. Allow me to introduce you—Mrs. Ansell—Miss Lester. This young lady, madame, is a surgeon's daughter in the true sense of the word. She was one of the passengers in that unfortunate train, Mrs. Ansell, and she was courageous enough to render great assistance to Mr. Lawford when he was attending to the 'bad wound' your maid received, and—"

"Lester—Lester," said Laura, and she stood for a moment motionless with her hand to her forehead, as if striving to recall some memory of the past, with her fine soft eyes intently fixed on Ella's countenance; "is it, can it be possible? Miss Lester tell me your Christian name; say something of your parentage. I had, many, many years ago, dear friends who bore that name. Happy it would make me to renew my old friendships!"

"My Christian name is Ella, madame, and as she spoke she raised her eyes with an expression of half wonder, half surprise, adding: "I have often heard my father talk of a lady named Ansell, whom he knew when residing in a village in Surrey. Is it possible, then, I have the pleasure of meeting his father and my mother's old friend?"

Old recollections of that sorrowful past in her life over which a veil had for so many years been thrown, surged up in the mind of Laura, and passing her arm round Ella's waist she kissed her tenderly whilst her face glistened with tears. The intense emotion of Mrs. Lawford, who was only a simple acquaintance of the lady, from the fact of her husband having attended the Squire professionally.

At length Laura said: "You must allow me to claim the privilege of an old friend of your good parents, Ella Lester; ay, and of yourself, for you were much with me in your early childhood, though too young to remember me. Now let us look well at you, Ella, said she, surveying the beautiful girl from head to foot. Ella cast down her eyes as Laura scanned every feature in her face.

At length Laura again observed: "Your early childhood gave rise to prophesies for the future, Ella. I could fancy that which you then were might be what you now are; but little would I be for me to say, however much I might ramble my memory, that I can call to mind one feature of your fair young face. And so your parents may well be proud of you, and I, the childless widow, whose babe was stolen from my arms, may wonder if my boy, long since a man, had, like you, ripened into personal beauty; but of that I trust it is not good for me to think; she added, addressing to her face back her eyes. "And now, Ella, tell me how long you are to stay in Exeter, because I shall write to my old friends, and I shall beg permission to visit you to Riverdale, after you have spent a few days at Exeter."

Meanwhile Mrs. Lawford had listened and wondered at what she had heard, and was well pleased when her husband entered the room, bringing the welcome news that Martha was much better, and might safely return to Riverdale on the following day.

"To Exeter, however, Ella was bound to go, and, having given her father's address to Laura, she bade farewell to the two ladies, and Mrs. Lawford accompanied her to the railway station.

"It was not without a feeling something akin to dread that Ella took her place in a first-class carriage, as she took the place of three days since returned vividly to her mind, and with it also seemed to see passing before her mental vision the ghastly scene of the injured and the dead."

CHAPTER IX. HEAR YE HEAR YE. "What a glorious success," exclaimed Ella Lester, the fair daughter of plebeian old Stegony, as on a late August evening she stood beside Laura and watched the setting sun slowly sinking into the bed of gold; "aye, and what a lovely place," she added, "what a dear, quiet little town, with its many gables and its nooks and corners, and then this beautiful garden, and the park beyond."

And the passionate faint and the sweet tones of her voice for some time before; and all rose blossoms from every clime. Love is that garden with perfect roses. She smiled on gazing Stegony's glowing words. "Dear Mrs. Ansell, how happy you must be to live in such a place as this; really Riverdale will have spoiled me. What shall I do in Stegony after a long residence in this lovely spot?"

"My dear young friend, it is an old truism that money does not make happiness; besides, in my own mind my whole life has been brightened by my early estate; it would be ungrateful of me to ever forget that crushing sorrow which, as I have told you, for some years deprived me of my reason, unconscious whether my long-lost son were living or dead; if he lives, what is to be and where he is; he has grown up as a stout-away lad, neglected by those who stole him from my arms? Is he one of the outcasts of society? All these are questions I vainly ask myself. That I shall ever meet him, or see his face, I have long ceased to entertain the faintest idea. But let me drop a successful salutation to you; talk to me of yourself, of your good parents, and let me know if with this fair face you have made no conquests; ay, you blush, Miss Ella, so out with your secret; you have felt me grand passion I see. I shall insist on your telling me all about it, my dear, in virtue of the fact that I know you when you were almost a baby."

And pointing her arm round Ella's shoulder, she advanced to a spot beside the lake, a favorite resort of her own in the summer weather, where the boughs of the trees kissed the limpid waters, now shining like a sheet of burnished gold as the tints of the gorgeous sunset fell upon them, whilst in the distance appeared the unroofed windows of the hall, reflecting the same brilliant hues.

And seating herself on a grassy knoll, she drew Ella beside her, and the latter told her tale of love, concealing only one thing, the name of her lover.

Then blushing deeply she drew forth the artist's miniature and placed it in the hand of Laura.

It was a telling likeness, portraying the broad brow, the large dark eyes, the slightly upturned nose, and the arch upper lip with just a little curve at the corner of the mouth, enough to give a somewhat haughty expression to the countenance; and each feature portrait on which Laura's eyes were earnestly riveted.

It was a parting companion to Ella, and was not in a simple look of chagrin.

"How strangely like," said Laura, after a long pause, during which she had attentively examined the miniature; but for that haughty lip, which would do for one of the House of Hapsburg, it strikingly reminds me of my dead husband. And his name, Ella, you have not told me his name."

"His name is not a well-sounding name, Mrs. Ansell; his name is Bunsell."

"No, dear, it is not; but after all with them till to-morrow, I can't freely tender my services to you. I will stay with her, sir, till it is necessary to proceed to some hotel in which I must rest for the night, and will see that she wants for nothing."

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