

## TANGLED THREADS

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Mrs. Ellsworth began to tremble with excitement, in view of what her companion had said.

"Could it be possible that the hour for her triumph had come at last?" she asked herself.

At all events she realized that the man was in a tender mood, and she resolved to make the most of her opportunity.

"That is a sweeping statement," she retorted, with a light laugh, while she toyed with the roses upon her breast, an act which attracted her companion's attention to the fact that she was wearing upon her head a portion of her floral offering.

"How do you know but what I may ask for somebody's head, as was done in that olden time to which you refer?"

"Ah! But I have no Herodias to deal with," he retorted in the same voice. They had added in a grave, mild voice.

"But, jesting aside, I can never forget those weary weeks at El Arish! When I look back, and recall what you did for my poor boy, I feel that, as far as I am personally concerned, the world laid at your feet would not be an adequate return for his precious life."

"How he loves that fellow!" said Marjorie Ellsworth to herself. But, aloud, she very modestly remarked:

"You make too much of my services, which, I assure you, were most willingly given, for I do not believe, for the life of Rob, and why? With a sudden burst of feeling, of course, I could not see him lying there, with the fever burning his poor life away, without making a desperate effort to save him."

"I know; you forgot yourself entirely—especially during those last 48 hours, when all hope had deserted me. Oh, I can never forget it—never. So you are to regard me as your staunch friend for all time—you are to call upon me in any emergency, and you will find me ever ready to respond, to any possible extent."

"Even to the half of your kingdom," repeated his companion, archly.

"Yes; and that would be far too small a return."

"Do not be too sure, for I may take you at your word," said the wily widow, leaning toward him, and lifting a smiling but tender glance at him.

"Try me, and see. Truly, Mrs. Ellsworth, I never was more earnest in my life. What can I do for you, to prove to you how grateful I am?" and, in his earnestness, he laid his hand lightly upon the slender, jeweled one that rested on the arm of her chair.

"Laughed out musically again."

"Suppose you cannot lay claim to any extensive 'kingdom,' if you count the people in it," she said. "It is practically composed of two individuals and Rob doubtless counts for half in your estimation."

"Yes, fully that; but, of course, I can't give you Rob—he is at his own disposal," was the laughing rejoinder, while the man had not a thought for himself, nor a suspicion of the precipice he was approaching.

"Well, then—suppose—suppose I claim the other half?"

The woman breathed with downcast eyes and heaving bosom.

Mr. Lancaster sat suddenly erect, and drew a long breath of astonishment.

But, even then, he did not believe she was in earnest; he honestly thought she was merely casting her jesting mood and simulating a little farther, just for the sake of being facetious.

But, for all that, he was amazed—shocked at the audacious construction which she had dared to put upon his words, even though it were but in jest.

He found himself in an extremely awkward position, and for a moment he was at a loss to know how to reply to her.

Then he was impelled to take it for granted that she was only making light of the subject, and answer her in the same strain.

"Really, my friend, you'll have to name something of more value," he retorted, laughing again. "That would be the poorest possible return for what you have done. Rob's young life is not to be named in the same breath. We old codgers, who have grown hoary crowned—running, his fingers nervously through his snow-white hair—'and passe' are possibly of very little account in the world."

Mrs. Ellsworth flushed crimson, with mingled anger and mortification, to have him evade her thus, but, having risked everything upon this desperate leap, she was determined that she could not beat a cowardly retreat.

"You undervalue yourself, Mr. Lancaster, and the hoary crown as you term it, is to me, a veritable crown of glory," she bravely returned, and with an air which plainly indicated that she was in no light frame of mind, if he was.

He leaned forward, and searched her face.

"Surely, Mrs. Ellsworth, you cannot have been in earnest in what you

have said," he remarked, in a tone of grave surprise.

"Why not?" she questioned, meeting his glance for an instant, then averting her eyes, and flushing again.

"But—you forget—" "What?"

"My past!" "No; I have forgotten nothing."

"And did you really think that such an arrangement could be possible?" the man inquired in a wondering voice.

"Why not, I ask you?" she demanded, with a touch of bravado, but shrinking, as if she had been struck.

"You ought to know that it would not be possible, Marjorie," he returned in a tone there was no mistaking, and addressing her by her given name for the first time in many years; "for," and he bent near to her, and whispered something in her ear.

"Ah! Is that so? Then you love her still!" she exclaimed with white lips, and in a harsh, rasping, tone.

"Yes; there has not been a day, an hour, or a moment that I have not yearned for her with all my soul!" said Halburton Lancaster, with a wall of despair in his tone that betrayed he was laboring under intense and painful emotion.

Marjorie Ellsworth now sat erect, and threw back her proud head defiantly.

She was deeply humiliated by the failure of her scheme—for she knew she had failed miserably—while, at the same time, she was enraged anew against her old-time rival, who had so successfully supplanted her in the hearts of two men.

"I cannot understand such unexampled fidelity," she sneered. "I cannot understand why you have lived alone all these years, if you have yearned for her like that—why have you not sought her, and tried your fate again?"

The man beside her groaned at the heartless taunt.

"I have sought for her everywhere," he said, "for, as soon as I recovered my senses after that terrible scene, I realized that I had done her a fearful wrong, and I would have pleaded on my knees for forgiveness."

"Then you have never seen her—never heard anything of her since that day?"

"Interposed Mrs. Ellsworth, with a suppressed eagerness which, had he not been so absorbed in his own sad thoughts, would have impressed him as somewhat strange."

"No; I could never obtain the slightest clue to her whereabouts; she seemed to have disappeared out of the world as completely as a meteor when it falls into space. I feared she might be in need of money, after she had so rashly fled from her home; and even though she never could have forgiven me, yet I would have found some way to provide for her, and to throw protection about her. She may be somewhere in the world today—she may be old, and faded from toiling for her living; she may be dead—I know not; but, living or dead, I love her as wholly, as devotedly, as madly as in the days of our youth. And so, you understand."

"Oh, yes; I could not fail to understand," suddenly interposed Mrs. Ellsworth, in a sharp, shrill tone, as she rose, and stood straight and tall, before him. "But allow me to say that Margaret and John Wilton and you were a trio of fools, whose equal I have never met—unless, perhaps, I except myself, because of my recent folly."

"Pray, Mrs. Ellsworth, let me say—"

Mr. Lancaster began.

But she swept past him with an air of an offended queen, and re-entered the hotel, going straight to her own room, and was seen among the guests no more that night.

Mr. Lancaster sat for a long time where she had left him, and, from his bowed head and dejected attitude, it was evident that his reflections were far from being of a cheerful nature.

An hour later, Mrs. Ellsworth sought Mrs. Sturdyvant, and her pale, haggard face plainly testified that she had been having a terrible battle with herself since her interview with Mr. Lancaster.

"Eliza, I am going to cut the party, and go directly home," she abruptly announced, as she threw herself wearily into a chair.

"What on earth do you mean, Marjorie?" demanded her sister-in-law in undignified amazement.

"Just what I say, Eliza. I am going to start for home tomorrow night. You know what disastrous news I have had from Jennings, and I can't rest until I know just how I stand with the world."

"Nonsense, Marjorie!" retorted Mrs. Sturdyvant, but studying her companion's face curiously. "Your tickets are paid for, and you might as well have the full benefit of them, and see the country as you go; while it is certainly the opportunity of a lifetime for Marjorie."

"Well, you know very well that tickets are not all that is necessary; it takes money, and plenty of it, too, as we are living, to foot the hotel bills; and I am sure, I don't know where I am to get it."

Mrs. Sturdyvant looked thoughtful for a few moments.

"I suppose I might lend you enough for that," she said at length.

"If I borrow, I do not know that I can ever pay," sharply returned the unhappy woman. "No," she replied in a tone of decision; "I shall leave for Hong Kong, where we take the steamer tomorrow evening, taking Marjorie with me. There will, doubtless, be other English and American tourists returning to the United States, and we shall not feel that we are traveling alone."

"You might leave Marjorie with me," said Mrs. Sturdyvant reflectively. "I do not like to have her lose all our delightful trips through China and Japan."

"I shall do no such thing! Do you think I am going all that journey by myself? It was the irritable response."

"No, I think not, Marjorie," he replied. "I probably shall have another opportunity to take this trip, and I feel as if I would like to avail myself of all the privileges to which I am entitled. I wish you would be sensible, and keep on with us. What if your matrimonial plans have failed? Rob and Mr. Lancaster are both true gentlemen, and they will do nothing to make you uncomfortable. I am sure, it will seem very strange to the other members of the party to have you leave us so suddenly, and start off alone on such a long journey by yourselves."

"I can't help it!" retorted Mrs. Ellsworth, growing hot and cold by turns, as she thought of what she had done that night, and knew that she could never face Mr. Lancaster again with any degree of composure. "I shall

simply state that business complications require me to hasten home—which is the truth, though it makes me almost heart-sick to think of what awaits me there, if things are really as bad as Mr. Jennings has written."

"You'd better let me lend you enough to tide over the present," urged her sister-in-law kindly.

"No; I shall go," was the dogged reply; and, with that ultimatum, she went back to her own room, where she passed a restless, miserable night.

She announced her plans the next morning, and, in view of her decision, and begged her to reconsider it, for she really had been a most enjoyable companion de voyage.

She would not retract, however, and she and Marjorie spent the day in packing and making ready for their hurried flight.

But Marjorie was very unreconciled to this unlooked-for move, for she had not yet relinquished all hope of winning Rob, in spite of the unmistakable reserve which he had manifested toward her upon rejoining the party. She pleaded and begged that her mother would allow her to remain with the aunt during the remainder of the trip, but the woman was inexorable.

Mr. Lancaster, as greatly relieved upon learning of her intentions. Indeed, he had almost been tempted to do the same thing, for he realized that all future relations between himself and Mrs. Ellsworth could not fail to be strained and uncomfortable, and would mar all his pleasure during the remainder of the trip.

To be Continued.

It takes all kinds of people to make a world. Possibly that is how your neighbor explains you.

A LINIMENT FOR THE LOGGERS.—Loggers find a life with exposure to many perils. Wounds, cuts and bruises cannot be altogether avoided in preparing timber for the drive and in river work, where wet and cold combined are of daily experience, coughs and colds and muscular pains cannot but ensue.

Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil, when applied to the injured or administered to the ailing, works wonders.

"Well," she observed at length, and rising, "I have told you my plans, Eliza—I am going home at once; I suppose, though, from what you have said, that you will not feel like coming with us?"

"No, I think not, Marjorie," he replied. "I probably shall have another opportunity to take this trip, and I feel as if I would like to avail myself of all the privileges to which I am entitled. I wish you would be sensible, and keep on with us. What if your matrimonial plans have failed? Rob and Mr. Lancaster are both true gentlemen, and they will do nothing to make you uncomfortable. I am sure, it will seem very strange to the other members of the party to have you leave us so suddenly, and start off alone on such a long journey by yourselves."

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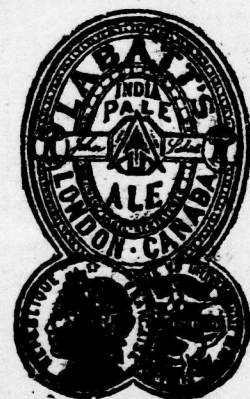
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