

## ONE LIFE ONLY.

## CHAPTER VI—Continued.

Are you not horrified to see a modern butler instead of a hoary seneschal, Una?" said Colonel Dysart, in a low tone, as that functionary came up with various other servants; but Atherstone heard him, and the gloom of his face passed away in a smile of amusement. "Thorpe might almost enact the part," he said, "he has been in our family forty years; but I hope before you make your pilgrimage through the house, Miss Dysart, you will not disdain some nineteenth century tea and fruit, instead of a boar's head, or any little dainty of that kind."

"Spurs in an empty dish is the only food that would suit my ideas," she answered, and her merry laugh woke the echoes of the old stone court.

"We have not heard such a sound as that this many a day, sir," said old Thorpe, as his master went up to give him his orders; "it does my heart good to hear it."

"It is pleasant music, doubtless," said Atherstone, "but I fear it scarce suits our old Abbey, anyhow we are not likely to have much of it here."

Turning back to the Dysarts, he helped Una to dismount, and then led them into a fine old hall, and through various large rooms filled with costly furniture of a somewhat antique description, till they came suddenly upon a sunny, tastefully-arranged boudoir that was in complete contrast to the rest of the house; a conservatory opened out from it, filled with the choicest flowers, and Atherstone placed an easy chair for Una close to it, so that she might enjoy their fragrance.

"I thought you would like this room," he said; "it was the one my mother always used, so I take pains to have it carefully kept exactly as she left it, though I generally sit in the library myself."

"Is it long since you lost her?" said Colonel Dysart.

"Yes, it is indeed; I was only six or seven years old."

"Do you remember her?" said Una, softly.

"Just enough to know that this is an excellent likeness," he answered, taking a miniature from the table and showing it to her. It represented a dark, aristocratic-looking beauty, with the same liquid hazel eyes that Humphrey himself possessed, but not otherwise resembling him. Una remarked this at once, saying she should never have guessed it was a portrait of his mother.

"No," he said, with a rather melancholy smile, "I am too complete an Atherstone to be like her at all, and this was painted when she was very young, before her marriage with my father." He turned round the miniature as he spoke, and showed engraved on the gold at the back of it the name of Philippa Devereux.

"Devereux!" exclaimed Colonel Dysart; "was she of the Mount Devereux family?"

"Yes, she was the youngest daughter of the last lord."

"In that case she was distantly connected with the Molynuxes, which fact constitutes my daughter in some sense your kinswoman."

"I am exceedingly glad to hear it," said Atherstone with a smile, looking round to Una.

"Do you mean that Mr. Atherstone and I are cousins?" she exclaimed, starting up as she eagerly waited for her father's reply.

"Only in a very remote Caledonian degree, I am afraid; but I believe if you could both get high enough in the genealogical tree you would meet somewhere at last," said Colonel Dysart.

"If it is only enough to prevent the

necessity of my being on my best behaviour at Atherstone Abbey, very stiff and polite," said Una, "I shall be quite satisfied."

"Pray do let us consider ourselves related to that extent at least," said Atherstone, "and I hope you will do exactly as you please in all ways within these walls."

"I think if I did I should rush off this very moment and explore the whole house quite by myself," said Una, with a rather saucy glance at him, anxious to see if by chance he proved himself afraid of her discovering any mystery; but he looked perfectly at his ease as he said, "You shall do so if you like, but I must warn you that the only result will be your losing yourself hopelessly in a labyrinth of passages, in five minutes' time."

"Then I must resign myself to go in a proper and reasonable manner, I suppose."

"And I think we must not delay if we are to be at home again before nightfall," said Colonel Dysart; so they started at once for a thorough inspection of the Abbey.

It proved to be simply an exceedingly fine specimen of an old mediæval castle, and Una appreciated and enjoyed it all enough to satisfy even Atherstone's almost morbid love for the place. At last they reached the picture gallery, where there was so much to be seen that it was impossible they could complete the inspection on that occasion, and Colonel Dysart was obliged to agree to Atherstone's earnest entreaty that they would come another time and spend a whole day with him, in order to give as much attention to some of the masterpieces as Una desired.

They were turning to leave the gallery, and Colonel Dysart had already preceded them out of it, when his daughter's attention was attracted by a picture, before which was hung a veil of black crape. She paused and looked up at Atherstone, hardly liking to ask him if she might see it. The sombre expression which his face sometimes wore suddenly darkened over it; but he did not hesitate to grant the mute request of her eyes, and in perfect silence he drew back the covering and let her look at the picture. Una stood before it, transfixed with a painful sense of awe, for never had she seen a representation of human life in any shape, which had made such a powerful impression upon her as that now before her. It was a large and most masterly painting, executed with strong effects of light and shade, and showing the interior of a gloomy old tower, lit up by a rude iron lamp that hung from the ceiling. A low couch of straw, with a rough covering flung over it, was in one corner, and at the other end was an enormous stone cross; in front of this, kneeling with clasped hands and head turned upwards in a perfect anguish of supplication, was a man still young, but haggard and emaciated to the last degree. He wore a coarse brown dress, with a knotted cord at the waist; and the evidences of a life of torment and penance which were all around him were as nothing compared with the terrible revelation of his despairing face, which spoke of a remorse and horror that could find no rest. But the most painful sensation which this strange picture caused Una was the unmistakable likeness she could trace in the wild mournful countenance, to that of Humphrey Atherstone.

It was with a timidity in her voice which she could not conquer that she whispered at last, "Who is this?" and he answered, more like a man talking in a dream than one who knew what he was saying, "Fulke Atherstone, of evil memory." He let the black drapery fall over the picture while he spoke, and Una made no attempt to say another word on the subject.

They left the gallery, and as they continued to explore the interminable rooms, the corridors built in the thickness of the wall, and other matters of interest, Una quite recovered her gaiety, and went flitting about like a sunbeam through the lurking shadows.

"It is growing late, Una, and we really must go," said Colonel Dysart; "we have detained Mr. Atherstone too long already."

"I hope we have not quite tired you out," she said, looking up at their host with her charming smile.

"On the contrary, it has given me the greatest possible pleasure to show the Abbey to those who can appreciate it so well," he said heartily.

"Then, if I might see the cave of the refractory monks, I will ask nothing more."

"Oh, by all means," said Atherstone. "It will not detain you long to go round to the back of the house, where the entrance to it is; if you will come down this turret stair we shall reach it in a moment."

He took them out through a little postern gate, which led to a terrace running the whole length of the house, and from which a precipitous cliff rose abruptly and towered far above them. The rocky foundations of the house were here quite exposed to view, and the mouth of the cave yawned visibly before them, closed in by an iron grating. This was opened by a key which Thorpe, who was in attendance on them, produced from the ponderous bunch he carried. A flight of stone steps led down to the vault, and Colonel Dysart, glancing in, said he was sure it was frightfully damp, and that he must decline visiting the bones of the refractory monks, or whatever it was they were going to see.

"I am afraid there is not even anything so interesting as their bones," said Atherstone; "but it is a curious old cave, and Miss Dysart may as well see it. Let me go first," he continued, "to show you the way;" and she followed him down the steep flight of steps, while her father sauntered away to the other end of the terrace.

There certainly was not much to be seen, except the moist walls of an underground cave, and the atmosphere was sufficiently chilly to make Una willing to go back very soon to the sunshine. She stumbled on the first step going up, and as they were all rather broken and rugged, Atherstone took her hand in his and went in front of her, guiding her safely to the top. He had stepped on to the terrace, and she was just following, when suddenly she felt his grasp tighten on her hand with a convulsive movement, of which he was clearly unconscious, for his eyes were fixed on some objects at a little distance, that seemed to have aroused in him a perfect passion of anger, which transformed his whole countenance in a manner that actually her, Eagerly she followed the direction of his eyes, and saw a man, whom she recognised as the strange-looking foreigner she had seen with Mr. Orichton, stealing away round the corner of the house, and evidently trying to escape observation.

As he disappeared, Atherstone dropped her hand, apparently forgetting her presence, and striding up to Thorpe, he seized hold of his arm with a violent grasp, and said, "What does this mean?—how have you dared to disobey my most positive orders?"

"It was not me, sir, indeed; I would sooner have died than let him in. It must have been the new footman, who does not know him by sight."

"Let every servant of the house be told that if he ever enters within the park walls again they leave my service, one and all; and go now at once, Thorpe, and see him well off my ground."

The old man hurried away, and Ather-