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The Imprisoned Heiress —OR— The Spectre of Egremont.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I will not go, however, until I see him," she murmured. "I will not betray mamma's secret, but I must see Lionel. What shall I do?"

A glance at the curtained windows decided her. With a feet step she crossed the floor, raised the heavy damask curtains, and stepped into the embrasure of the window.

The curtains had scarcely fallen to their former position when the door of the room softly opened and a head peered in. Aimee could see it through the edge of the lace drapery bordering the damask which concealed her, and she could hardly repress a shriek at the sight.

It was not the head of Lord or Lady Egremont, or of any one she had ever seen.

It was unmistakably the head of a man, with flaxen hair, cut close and surmounted by a cloth cap. Aimee saw that his face was covered with a mask, an article she had never before seen, and which terrified her exceedingly.

This strange head moved about as if surveying the room, and the next moment the door opened wider, a bulky form entering the apartment.

The door was then closed. Aimee shrank back farther into the recess, fearful lest the terrible being should discover her.

She remembered the words of the countess, that if she ventured outside her own rooms, or betrayed the secret of her identity, a horrible fate was in store for her.

Perhaps, thought the innocent maiden, this terrible object, with its pink, immovable face, its wide, ghastly mouth, its cavernous eyes, was her enemy, from whom she had been all her life so carefully guarded.

How she wished now that she had heeded the warning of Lady Egremont.

But the masked intruder did not approach the windows, although once or twice poor Aimee thought his eyes encountered hers.

He crossed the floor, peered into the bedroom, and then boldly entered the inner chamber.

Aimee slightly moved her position, continuing to watch him, lest he should spring upon her unawares.

The next movement, however, seemed to her decidedly trivial.

He went to the dressing-table, upon which lay a profusion of scent-cases and trinkets, and took up a cut-glass carafe, which was filled with drinking water. Taking off the tumbler that covered it, he took from his pocket a small vial containing a colorless liquid, which he commenced pouring into the carafe, holding the latter up against the light.

This operation was somewhat retarded by his constant glances at the

door, but was finally accomplished to his satisfaction, and he then restored the article as he had found them.

Then with an audible chuckle, this strange being swiftly crossed the floor to the hall, looked out cautiously as if to assure himself that no one would intercept him, and then drew his head back with a muttered malediction.

He instantly reclosed the door, and looked about him, as Aimee had done for a hiding-place.

How the young girl's heart throbbed then.

He took a step toward the window in which she was secreted, and then darted toward the other, which was nearer the door, and enounced himself behind the curtains.

With difficulty, Aimee repressed the shriek that arose to her lips.

She believed that the masked intruder was there for no good purpose, but whether he meant harm to her—or to Lord Ashcroft, she could not decide.

She scarcely dared to breathe lest he should hear her.

A few minutes thus passed, and then the door opened, and Lord Ashcroft appeared on the threshold.

He had lingered in the corridor to bid his sister good-night, and to be of good courage, and he now paused until he had heard her lock her door, and then entered his parlor.

He did not sit down immediately, but walked to and fro, unconscious that two pairs of eyes were fixed upon him—one pair that might have belonged to an angel beaming love upon him, the other pair glowing like a demon's with hatred.

His lordship did not look as happy as his evening's tête-à-tête with his betrothed would have warranted. On the contrary, he looked sad and troubled, and Aimee's heart sympathized with him.

He seated himself by the fire at length, and covered his face with his hands.

Aimee divided her attention between him and the object of her fears.

Lord Ashcroft sank into a reverie, and the maiden soon observed the fluttering of the curtains at the other window, and then saw the masked intruder step down from his seat and steal toward the door.

His feet were encased in twick flannel stockings, and his movements were very still, so it was scarcely to be wondered at that Lord Ashcroft was not aroused.

He opened the door softly, glided into the corridor, and then closed the door behind him.

The faint noise made in closing it attracted Lord Ashcroft, and he raised his head and looked in that direction.

Seeing no one, and hearing nothing more, he easily persuaded himself

that the sound was only a fancy on his part, and he did not cover his face again.

Leaning back in his chair, he thought of the specter he had seen in his room, and wished that he might see it again. He had thought of it continually since his visit to the portrait-gallery. Although condemning himself for what he deemed his folly and unreasonableness, the saintly beauty of the "specter" had inspired him with a distaste for the material charms of the heiress, and more than once he uttered the vain wish that he had lived a century before.

One thing he had resolved upon—to obtain, if possible, a copy of Lady Jasmine's portrait.

Whether the ghost had really appeared to him, or whether he had simply experienced an extraordinary illusion, he knew not. That the apparition was a living, breathing girl, he had scarcely suspected. And yet he had felt no fear at beholding what, as he was half inclined to believe, was the ghost of a murdered lady—nothing of that fear ghosts are popularly supposed to inspire.

The romance in his nature had been raised into activity and charmed by an occurrence that seemed to him so unparalleled, and he now mused:

"I wish she would appear to me again—the Lady Jasmine."

Aimee heard the faintly-expressed wish, and a flush stole into her cheeks and a happy look into her innocent eyes.

"The glorious embodiment of more than my wildest dreams!" continued Lord Ashcroft, sighing.

There was a fluttering of the curtains, and she stood before him, yet at a little distance.

More than ever ethereal and angelic as she looked, there was a glow and flush about her, a steady luster in her dreamy eyes, and a tender smile about the lips, that made her appear as if born of some lovely sunset or sunrise, instead of being the apparition of the dead.

If Lord Ashcroft had been touched and charmed by her in her sad and distressed mood, he was absolutely entranced now.

He feared to move or speak lest he should frighten from him the lovely vision. His gaze, though full of wild surprise, was so expressive of admiration and delight, that Aimee's eyes drooped with sweet confusion, and she moved uneasily.

"Do not go!" cried Lord Ashcroft. "Stay a little longer, I beseech you!"

The maiden lifted her head, put up her hand with a warning gesture, and then approached the table by which he sat, laid her little miniature portrait upon it, and retreated to her former position.

The young nobleman was bewildered by this movement, but put out his hand and grasped the picture.

His delight on discovering what it portrayed may be imagined.

He looked at it earnestly, and said: "Aimee! Yes, she might well have been 'beloved!'"

He pressed it to his lips, then put it in his bosom, fastening the ribbon to it around his neck.

The maiden smiled beamingly upon him, pleased because he seemed to prize her portrait, and then her sweet tender voice said:

"I am not a specter, Lord Ashcroft. I am not the Lady Jasmine. I am only Aimee."

"Only Aimee!" repeated his lordship, still further bewildered.

"Yes, that is all!" she assented.

"I look like the Lady Jasmine, but I am flesh and blood. See!"

She glided toward him and placed one tiny hand upon his own.

He prisoned it in his strong clasp, assuring himself by its trembling, bird-like flutter that it was a human hand.

Recovering his self-possession, he released the tiny hand, arose to his feet, and addressed her courteously and smilingly.

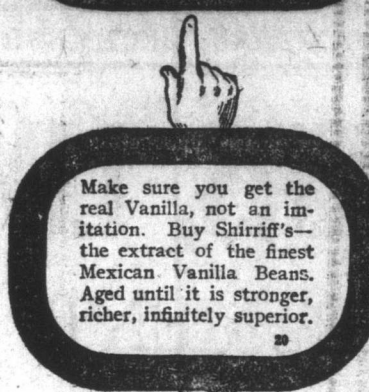
"I see how mistaken I have been. Despite my better judgment, I fancied you a specter. I suppose you have been tempted, by your resemblance to the Lady Jasmine, to enact a little masquerade. You must allow me to congratulate you upon your success. Are you visiting at Egremont?"

Aimee was too embarrassed for a moment to reply. In fact, she hardly knew how to answer without imperiling the secret she did not herself understand.

"N-no. I am not visiting here," she replied, truthfully enough.

(To be continued.)

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Fashion Notes

POSES ON FURS.

This winter every smart woman is wearing on her fur stole or wrap a posy of real or artificial flowers.

Some curious materials are used to make the latter blooms. Very clever reproductions of lilies, for instance, are composed of white fur. Pink camellias, orange nasturtiums, multi-hued sweetpeas and quaint miniature Early Victorian nosegays are formed of velvet, ribbon, leather, suede, tinsel, or feathers.

A composition resembling porcelain is also used to make attractive buttonholes.

Most of the artificial posies are realistically scented.

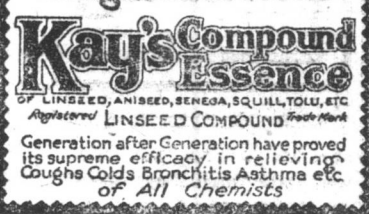
The fashion for wearing artificial flowers has extended to footwear. The latest evening shoes are ornamented with mammoth blossoms of crinkled silk.

Points for Smart Women. "Skeleton" shoes of silver or coloured tinsel braid are fashionable evening footwear.

The newest dressing or rest gown is a very richly-coloured affair, being made of multi-hued chenille-patterned georgette lined with silk.

Smart "house woggles" this winter are in jumper-coat design expressed in cashmere in Jacquard designs.

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The Appropriation Bill authorizes the Government to spend £100,000 towards the cost of an additional cruiser for the New Zealand Navy, making the naval expenditure £120,000 a year.

During the debate Mr. Wilford, leader of the Opposition, said the Singapore base was essential for safety, as the Japanese were steadily moving their base towards Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Massey, the Prime Minister, said he had not forgotten the services of Japan in the war, but New Zealand must do her share towards the defence of the Empire. War would come whether New Zealand liked it or not.

New Zealand responsibilities now ranged from Nauru Island to the Ross Sea, and the British Government asked the Dominion to take control of Samoa.



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