

SWEET IS REVENGE.

By J. Fitzgerald Molloy,

Author of "How Came He Dead?" "That Villain Romeo." "A Modern Magician," &c

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CHAPTER XXIII.—Continued.

"I should like to see Mr. Wrayghton when he comes down," Sir Danvers said. "I'm told he is clever; he will be able to give an idea of his patient's state."

"I have asked him to come here before he leaves," Mrs. Horrow answered. "He has not long been with Lord Hector."

"You will offer him some refreshment before he leaves, my dear," said her husband. "Even men of the strongest nerve are sometimes overcome after attendance of such a case as this."

"Lord Hector's head is dreadfully cut; the doctor at first feared the skull was completely smashed," Mrs. Horrow remarked. "A brutal attempt at murder," said Sir Danvers.

"Quite enough to prostrate the strongest of us; you must certainly give Wrayghton some brandy; I feel quite overcome myself," the doctor added. The guest chamber was immediately above the drawing-room, and they could hear the footstep and occasional movements of the medical men. Suddenly a bell rang loudly, pealing on the calm night air with slow, decreasing sound. Those in the drawing-room started and glanced at each other, wondering if the wounded man's soul had taken the one great step leading to the silent shadowy land beyond. Mrs. Horrow, on recovering herself, went into the hall and met a servant coming from the chamber. The doctors merely required a man to support their patient whilst they bound his head, and the butler volunteered his services, morbidly anxious to take part in the scene and elevate himself to a position of importance amongst his fellows.

Captain Fothergill sat as far from the light as possible, his face pallid, his hands twitching nervously, his mind in a state of confusion. He had intended to take this man's life, and yet his existence had not ended. A thousand times he anathematized himself as a fool for not having completed his work as he had intended. If through any chance Lord Hector recovered, then ruin beyond repair stared the captain in the face. No, Maynes could not live, die he surely must. His death could only be a question of hours or minutes. Did opportunity permit the captain would gladly have put the finishing touch to the work he had begun; but surely there would be no need for that; the fellow could never see another day.

Warily he waited until the medical men came slowly downstairs and entered the drawing-room, with pale faces and grave demeanor.

"Unhappy circumstance," said the doctor. "Is he still living?"

"Yes, he is still living, but his condition is critical, most critical," answered Mr. Wrayghton, a tall, thin, dark man, who might well represent death's messenger.

"Is there any hope of his recovery?" the baronet asked.

"Very little indeed, Sir Danvers; there is a serious fracture of the skull. I am inclined to think he was struck with a blunt stick; had it been a sharp instrument death must have been instantaneous. I should advise that his friends be made acquainted with his condition."

"Of course," replied Sir Danvers. "He was my guest last week, and would have been again but for this murderous assault, and I am naturally interested in him."

"Of course, Sir Danvers," the medical man answered, bowing gravely.

"Therefore I should not like to leave anything undone which might tend towards saving his life."

"Whilst there's life there's hope," replied the surgeon.

"Exactly. I have every reliance on your skill, but it struck me you might like to consult with such a man as Eldon, and so I shall ask him to come down from town tomorrow."

"I haven't the slightest objection, Sir Danvers; in fact I should be glad to have his opinion. Doctor Welmsing and I have done all we can do for our patient, which is very little; we should be very much pleased to consult him."

"Then, my dear sir, on your return to Lowbridge tonight, will you kindly telegraph to him in my name, asking him to come down to-morrow? And, by the way, you will want a trained nurse, he might bring a reliable person with him from one of the hospitals."

"I shall mention it. I brought a nurse from Lowbridge, a kindly, dependable woman, but lacking skill. She will remain tonight."

"You will have some soda water with your brandy, Wrayghton?" queried the doctor, then added, in an authoritative tone he had not ventured to use before.

"Maria, the doctors who have some brandy. This has been quite a shock to me," he added, addressing the company in general, "a delightful young fellow, Lord Hector; and to think how uncertain is life—has he brought the soda water, my dear—it's a lesson—a sad lesson to us all. Pray help yourself, Wrayghton—for in the midst of life we are in—whisky, did you say you preferred whisky, Dr. Welmsing? I find brandy a better aid to my digestion, especially at this time of night. Yes, the night cometh when no man may—take a little more, captain—my dear Fothergill, you're not going without having some brandy; it will help to put you straight, for like myself you are quite upset. Well, my friends, all flesh is grass—it is a sad business, indeed."

As the captain was about to follow Sir Danvers out of the room, he took Dr. Welmsing aside. "Your patient was an old friend of mine," he said, "and this affair has been quite a blow to me. Do you think there is really any chance of his living; tell me honestly what you think?"

"I cannot see how he can recover; I think his life is but a question of hours. I shall be surprised if I find him alive in the morning."

"Very sad, very sad," said the captain, grasping his hand. "Good night, doctor. I thank you for your opinion; it's well to know the worst at once," he added, following his cousin.

"This is to certify that I suffered for many years from Salt Rheum. I applied the ointment of the Willow Spa Springs for two weeks, and although several years have elapsed I have had no return of the trouble." Mrs. Fothergill.

"I have drunk a small quantity of the Willow Spa Water, during a few weeks, and am greatly relieved of dyspepsia, for which I believe it is a specific. I persevered in it." N. W. TUPES.

CHAPTER XXIV.—WHAT THE CAPTAIN SEES.

When morning came Lord Hector was still amongst the living. The Hayton practitioner, visiting him betimes, found his condition scarcely changed; no forward step had been made towards recovery. Sir Danvers had been early to make enquiries, but prompt as his visit was, he was forestalled in that charitable act by his cousin, whose solicitude for the patient admitted no rivalry. He had been surprised and disappointed at finding his victim yet existed, for he had retired to bed with the comfortable assurance that death would claim Lord Hector before morning.

As he returned to the abbey his dark face expressed perplexity and gloom. Now that Maynes lingered, it was possible that he might ultimately recover; and the moment he regained consciousness the accusation would be made regarding the diamonds, and the story of the attempted murder related. Why had he not made sure of having taken this life which was in so many ways an obstacle to him?

Late in the afternoon the famous London surgeon, Sir James Eldon, arrived. Sir Danvers had sent a brougham to meet him at Lowbridge, and waited to receive him at the rectory. Accompanied by the hospital nurse, silent, sad-faced and self-contained, and Mr. Wrayghton, loquacious, subservient, and smiling, the great man visited the patient, carefully examined the fracture at the back of the skull and the wounds upon the forehead, rebound them, and felt his pulse. He then asked some questions of Mr. Wrayghton, gave directions to the nurse, looked once more at the senseless man, and left the chamber.

Mr. Wrayghton opened the door of the drawing-room for Sir James, where they found the baronet impatiently waiting the verdict which the great man might pronounce. The doctor sat in a window reading the account of a neighboring horse race in a sporting paper.

"What do you think of the patient?" Sir Danvers asked.

"His is a very serious case," replied the London surgeon gravely.

"Just what I said," remarked Mr. Wrayghton blandly.

"He may recover the fracture," continued Sir James, "but fever I see is about to set in."

"Just what I feared, though I didn't like to express it," added Wrayghton.

"Bless my soul," said the doctor, speaking for the first time, "fever, I suppose it will be contagious. Could he be moved; this house is so small, and there is abundance of room at the abbey, which is close by, as you are probably aware."

"To move him in his present condition would probably prove fatal; he must remain where he is; but you need have no fear, it is brain fever which threatens him, and that is not contagious."

The doctor breathed more freely. "My dear sir, you quite relieve me—a glass of sherry—you are not aware perhaps I am the father of a family—or would you prefer a little brandy and soda—it was on their account my fears arose, not on my own."

"Has Lord Hector a naturally strong constitution, was he temperate in his habits?"

"I should think so," answered Sir Danvers. "He has roughed it a great deal in Australia, and seemed robust and healthy."

"Then he may pull through, but it is impossible to decide at this stage of the case," said Sir James filling himself out some sherry.

These were the first words of hope the baronet heard, and he welcomed them with gladness.

"Exactly what I thought," said Mrs. Wrayghton, helping herself to some brandy, and bowing to the great man who promptly turned away. Had he expressed an opinion that Lord Hector would dance a hornpipe tomorrow his subordinate would have declared that was precisely what he expected.

"Will you not come down again in the course of a week?" Sir Danvers asked the famous surgeon.

"I don't think there will be necessity for another visit from me," he said, adding with professional punctilio, "I leave him in excellent charge."

Mr. Wrayghton swallowed his brandy at a gulp, smiled, bowed, and rubbed his hands. This was a sentence he would promptly repeat for the next twelve months to all who listened, and to many who would not.

Sir Danvers handed the great man a cheque, on which he cast a scrutinizing eye as he folded it carefully and thrust it into his pocket-book. He then shook hands, and hastily slipping into the brougham which waited him was driven to the Lowbridge station.

For the first time since the butler had announced Lord Hector's murder Sir Danvers felt some relief, and he was able once more to turn his thoughts towards his own grief. Again and again his heart reproached him for having doubted his wife, even though appearances were against her. In a moment of passion, wrought to fury by jealousy, he had spoken bitter words of accusation and condemnation instead of asking her calmly if what his heart feared were indeed true, and of showing her that which he held as proof against her loyalty.

He had acted hastily and brutally, and he would have given years of his life if he could undo what he had done.

He would gladly have sought her, but he knew not where in the great world of London she might have taken refuge, and he instinctively withheld from employing the aid of detectives. Would she ever, he wondered, come back to him of her own free will; would she, if innocent, as now he almost believed, ever forgive him the words he had spoken? As he, after the departure of the London surgeon, returned towards the home which now seemed so desolate to him, an idea struck him. Many a time in the happy months gone by Ethel had read out to him the strange advertisements in the agony column of the *Times*, laughing over them light-heartedly, won-

dering if they ever met the eyes of those to whom they were addressed, and had the effect desired by the inserter. Perhaps she read them still. Hoping she did he immediately determined to insert a few lines in this column, framed in a manner she would recognize as addressed to herself, in which he would beg her to send him her address, or to return to her home. Coming to this resolution he hastened his steps that he might put it into execution at once.

As he crossed the great hall on his way to the study he encountered his cousin.

"Well," he asked, "what's the latest news from the Rectory?"

"Sir James Eldon has seen Maynes, and has gone again."

"So soon; did he consider his visit useless?"

"No," he said, there was hope of his recovery."

The captain dropped the cigar case he held, and stared at the speaker. "He said that I'm very glad, of course, he added, in a voice of despair and walked quickly out of the hall on to the terrace."

"If he recovers it is all up with me," he added to himself.

He went round to the stables, ordered one of the grooms to saddle a horse for him, and in a few moments was on the highroad, riding he neither knew nor cared in what direction. Setting the horse into a sharp canter he continued his way for miles without drawing rein, striving by bodily exercise to outstrip and overcome the harassing thoughts that assailed him.

But that pace he fleet as the wind he could not escape the pain of his heart with him. The flanks of his horse were covered with sweat and foam as he turned his head homewards and prepared to face the situation mentally.

In the course of some days or weeks Lord Hector might recover his memory, and by a word have his enemy arrested for robbery and attempted murder. Before that time came, he, Captain Fothergill, must leave the country quietly, and, if possible, unobserved, and seek fresh fields for his energies—say New Zealand or Florida.

To accomplish this he must have money, and at present he had none. For some time past he had drawn heavily on Sir Danvers, and he supposed that even to his cousin's liberality there must be some limit. However, he would try it once more, it might be for the last time, and if he failed another resource was possible.

As he rode he thought of the belt he wore, a belt he wore around his waist, and smiled complacently.

If he could have counted on sufficient time he would have asked Meg's hand in marriage, secured her fortune, and left her to deplore his loss; but he knew Sir Danvers would not consent to such a union in his present troubled state. If he were to linger at the abbey much longer, Lord Hector might recover in the meantime, and put an end to all his calculations. To-morrow or next day he would make an appeal to the baronet for a cheque on the London bank.

For an unexpected quarter, journey to town, make private preparations for his voyage, and a little while later disappear.

It was grievous to think that perhaps after he had taken the trouble of parting Sir Danvers and his wife, and helping to secure his position as heir presumptive to the estates, he must quit the country. But then he reflected, his cousin being hale and healthy might outlive him; and he at least had made a haul of forty thousand pounds worth of diamonds. He was inclined to consider the situation, and as he rode he thought of the money he had drawn at all away before leaving."

"Yes, I had no idea you would want it, and I intended going back to see you, and taking you away if they would let me."

She laughed for joy, a laugh that was laden with tears.

"I knew you were good and honorable, and that you loved me," the poor creature said, gazing rapturously into the evil face which, for her eyes, love had endowed with all the outward signs of nature's highest nobility.

He felt easier in his mind after having come to this conclusion. That evening, the next day he would see one of the doctors and ascertain when Lord Hector, supposing his recovery probable, might be expected to regain consciousness. At dinner he ate hurriedly, drank deeply, and then, after a few minutes' rest, he went to his room, and lay down to sleep.

The air was unusually sultry; a few hours before the sun had set in a blaze of crimson light, then fell in sudden night. Great clouds had come in slow and heavy procession upon the moon, and the moon's path where she walked in heaven was a path of gloom.

Absorbed in his thoughts and working out his scheme, he strayed down through the park at a leisurely pace. Now and then the clouds lifted, and the moon glared at him in the fullness of her glory. As her light fell with aerial splendor on the groves stretching before him, he raised his head mechanically, when his eyes fell on the tall, slight, graceful figure of a woman advancing towards him. Suddenly he stood still, perplexed and bewildered, and for a second remained unconscious whether this was a spectral illusion or a human form he saw before him.

CHAPTER XXV.—AN UNWELCOME SURPRISE.

Capt. Fothergill was not left long in doubt regarding the identity of the woman before him, for seeing him she gave a low cry, stretched out her arms, and running forwards full of confidence and joy embraced him.

"Oh, Jack, Jack, at last I have found you after all the weary time we have been parted," she exclaimed between the sobs that well nigh choked her utterance.

A curse rose to his lips which he with difficulty restrained. With a fierce anger rising in his heart he hesitated as to whether he should give the all-revered figure of this woman and fling her from him, or dissemble his feelings until he discovered what fate had drifted her across his path again. A woman scorned as he already knew, was a dangerous thing, and now in the midst of his trouble and on the eve of his escape, he should prove a formidable obstacle. Perhaps she was still mad. Smothering down his rage he allowed her to clasp him round the neck and press him to her breast.

"Jack," she moaned, "are you not glad to see me again?"

The comfort of making Soap from Kerr's Eucalypti and Vegetables made up a favorite dish in the house, the camp or the ship. The vegetables are commended in proportions to blend all flavors, delicately.

"Glad, of course I am," he replied. "But the surprise of seeing you has almost stunned me. Where on earth have you come from?"

"I should have remembered you didn't expect me," she said in her sweet plaintive voice. "You have not welcomed me, nor," she added in a lower tone, "have you kissed me."

He bent down his head until his lips just brushed hers. "I thought you were still in Australia. How did you come to England?" he asked, leading her under the shadow of the limes.

"These people let me out at last from the asylum. It was all on account of that horrid dream they put me there. For it was a dream," she continued lowering her voice and pleading to him as it seemed for confirmation, "in which I saw you standing blood-stained, a knife in your right hand, your friend Hawkins lying dead at your feet: saw it all to a terrible blow was dealt me, and darkness came to shut out the sight—surely it was all a dream," she added pitifully.

"That was all," he said. He could not find voice to utter more; his face grew terror-stricken at her words, whilst a murderous desire rose in his mind as he regarded the frail woman clinging to him, and then looked forth into the boundless darkness of his surroundings.

"I knew it," she said, with a cry of relief that came straight from her heart; "I knew it was a dream, but it haunted me by night and day, by day and night, asleep or awake, awake or asleep; yet I never told them what it was that burned in my brain; never spoke to them of the picture painted in blood and flame, and forever met my aching sight, whether I looked up to heaven or down to earth."

"You are sure you never spoke of this fancy?" he asked, with a trembling eagerness, regarding her as a tiger might its prey.

"Never! I kept it here in my brain—it was too terrible to speak of, too terrible to think of concerning one I love—but think of it I must, it was before me everywhere."

"Yes, yes, but that is past, you must speak of it no more. How did you come to England?"

"As a stewardess on a vessel; no one knew me, I called myself Mrs. Freeman. I did not write to you, fearing you might forbid me to come, and I wanted to surprise you. I have longed for sight of you day and night, for many a month, and now I would leave her behind, and I may be for I love you, and I cannot live longer without you."

He paused a moment before answering, pondering on what course he should take. For the present, at least, he must humor and deceive her; and in a couple of weeks he would leave her behind, and I may be for I love you, and I cannot live longer without you."

"You are not angry with me?" she asked in nervous tones.

"Angry," he replied. "Why should I be angry? Where have you been staying in London?"

"In a house recommended me by one of the passengers on the vessel. The landlady is very kind, but Jack, I owe her some weeks' rent, the money I earned as stewardess, as well as that which an old school friend gave me at starting, is all spent."

"No money?" he said.

"None," she answered, and then, whilst a blush colored her pale cheeks, and the words hesitated on her lips, she continued "I suppose, dear, you did not think I should want any money—my own money I intended to use. When I came to the asylum, the banker told me you had drawn it all away before leaving."

"Yes, I had no idea you would want it, and I intended going back to see you, and taking you away if they would let me."

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turn," he said, heedless of the condition of poverty which these words revealed.

"I fear not," she replied timidly.

"You unfortunately came at a time when I am hard up," he grumbled.

"But, Jack, dear, surely you haven't spent all our money—my—my fortune."

"No, no, of course not," he answered readily. "What I meant was that I had very little money with me."

He paused, then an idea flashed on him. If she had sold her jewelry to a pawnbroker why not employ her in turning some of the diamonds he carried about him into ready money.

"Does the fellow to whom you sold your brooch know your name?" he asked quickly.

"No," she replied. "I have kept it a secret from everybody."

He was silent a moment, thinking out the probable consequences of the act he meditated, and then unclasping a belt of chamois leather he weighed it as if its possession gave him gratification. He then took a pocket knife, ripped the belt at one end, and forced out a stone that flashed like fire in the moonlight. She who looked on uttered an exclamation of surprise, but unheeding her, he with a sudden movement snapped the stone and its setting from the ornament of which it formed a part, and held it out towards her. It was the clasp of the stolen necklace. "Take it," he said in a determined voice, "I bought this for you some time ago, when I had more money to spare, but now I think we had better sell it to your pawnbroker."

"Oh, how kind and generous you are," she said, looking at him with eyes dim with tears of gratitude and love. "And you really thought of me, and would have given me this," she continued, holding the jewel in the palm of her hand and watching it sparkle and blaze with every movement she made.

"Of course," he said, as he fastened the belt around him carefully and smiled in scorn at her credulity. "But such a trifle hardly suits you at present, we had best dispose of it, the money will be more useful."