

A Love Affair

CHAPTER XXII.

The color had left Constance's face long before the dressing-bell rang, and its reflection startled her as she saw it in the glass: startled and warned her. One glance at that pale face would tell Rawson Fenton that she was afraid of him. She could not endure that. At such a moment she would meet him unflinchingly, and outward show, at any rate, so while she dressed she schooled herself into something that looked like self-possession and indifference.

"I have come to say 'Good-night,'" he said. "Good-night, Mr. Fenton," she said. He made his adieu to the marchioness and the duchess. "But your carriage," said the former. "You must let us send you home, Mr. Fenton."

"No, dear Mr. Rawson Fenton," said "Mr. Fenton," exclaimed the footman. "I beg your forgiveness for my unpunctuality, Lady Brakespear," he murmured, as he bent over her hand. "But I met with an accident on the road."

"An accident!" exclaimed two or three voices in chorus. "Yes, nothing of any consequence," he said quietly. "Indeed, it was rather amusing than otherwise. The wheel came off my brougham. It was one I had hired at Berrington, and the worthy owner seemed to consider that a new coat of paint was all that was necessary to keep it together."

Constance's heart sank as Rawson Fenton approached and offered her his arm. The marchioness had assigned her to him! "What a beautiful place this is!" he said as the marchioness said grace, and they seated themselves. "I had an opportunity of seeing it to advantage as I walked up the avenue; the moon was shining."

"Yes," said Constance, looking straight before her. "Soup, sir?" asked a footman at his elbow. "Clear or thick?" Rawson Fenton replied at hazard and took up his spoon. Suddenly the expression of his face changed, and his eyes grew fixed upon the innocent piece of plate.

"How seldom one sees a crest that is markedly appropriate to the house to which it belongs. "Yes," assented Constance. "The Brakespear crest," he repeated. "A spear, broken apparently, with an eagle hovering over it."

"I wonder what you are, my friend," he thought, "and what you are lurking about Brakespear Castle?" "Good-night," said the man, getting his arm free. "Don't go, my man," he said, smoothly. "I see the village constable standing by the inn there, and I shall be compelled to call him if you attempt to leave me."

"You see, of course! A broken spear—Brakespear. I don't think I ever met with one more appropriate to the family name." "No?" said Constance. "He turned to his plate with a smile, but his acute brain was wonderful to relate, in a whirl. The dining-room of Brakespear Castle vanished from his view, and, instead, he said himself in the lonely hut in the Australian wilds, the log-fire burning brightly, and himself kneeling in front of it, looking at a ring which he had picked up from the floor, after the rangers had fled. And that ring bore, engraved upon it, this same crest—a broken spear and an eagle. The crest of the Marquis of Brakespear! The man who had robbed him of the woman he loved, the woman he had sworn to make his own!"

"Who are you, my friend?" he said. "I'll tell you," was the calm reply. "My name is Rawson Fenton." The man started, and looked as if thrown off his guard by the announcement. "You know me, it appears, my friend?" he said. "Not I, nor don't want to."

"We think of Italy, Rome, Venice and Dante's Florence," the marquis was saying, in an undertone, but still audible to Rawson Fenton; "anywhere that Constance likes." "So he was speaking of their wedding-tour! A sharp glance at through Rawson Fenton's heart, and he glanced out of the corner of his eyes at the beautiful face beside him. Their honeymoon trip! Then they were to be married soon. He bent lower over his plate, and his breath came fast and his face paled.

"At last the ladies rose. Rawson Fenton opened the door for them, and as Constance passed out he let his eyes dwell longingly, hungrily on her face. She had never seemed more lovely, more worth winning to him than she did to-night. "Draw your chair closer," said the marquis, with the smile that was once so rare but was now so frequent on his face. "We have an old port, if you care for it, Mr. Fenton," and he touched the rare wine lying snug in his wicker cradle. "There is no wine like port."

"And yet there are so many rivalls in the field," said Rawson Fenton, holding the glass up to the light and viewing it critically. "For instance, the Australian wine?" "You were saying—" "I was going to say that the Australian wines were meeting with a great deal of notice," said Rawson Fenton. He had moved up to the next seat to the marquis, and his keen eyes were fixed upon him, but with a veiled keenness. "Yes, yes," assented the marquis, "so I have heard."

"I take a great interest in Australia," said Rawson Fenton, leaning back in his chair with an easy smile. "I suppose it is because I began to make money there." "Were you ever there, Lord Brakespear?" I have heard that you are a great traveller." "Oh, yes, I have been to Australia." "Indeed! What part, may I ask?" "I beg your pardon, Mr. Fenton. What part? Oh, I roamed about promiscuously. It is an interesting country. They went into the drawing room. His eyes wandered toward Constance at the piano. Her voice—for they had persuaded her to sing—rang in his ears. Her presence, the sight of her face, the sound of her voice, had awakened the old passion in his breast. She was betrothed to the Marquis of Brakespear. No matter. He would win her, snatch her from him. She should be his!

old Daniel isn't coming over here to prosecute me for a trifle like that." "No, I should think not," assented Rawson Fenton, amiably—too amiably; "but the story is not quite finished, my friend. You don't ask how it happened that Long Ned possessed a horse. He didn't steal it from the farm; how did he come by it?"

"Don't remember, perhaps? I'll tell you. Long Ned had got a horse, and a good one, because he had joined the rangers." "That's a lie," he growled. "Fardon me, Ned, it's the truth. I know, because I saw his description among those of the rangers wanted by the Government police. See?"

"There was a pretty substantial reward offered for those men—one or any of them, and it's an offer still, I believe, consequently—" "I don't breathe hard, and eyed his persecutor as if he would have liked to have sprung at his throat, but said nothing. "What I want to know is, for whom did you mistake me to-night?" said Rawson Fenton. "Ned set his lips lightly, and pulled at his beard, looking sideways up at the pale, calm face.

"Suppose I know already whom it was you expected to see!" "No matter," he said. "I will walk. It is at the blacksmith's in the village, no doubt," and he passed out. He had reached the dark turn of the road, when suddenly a dark figure stepped out of the darkness and touched his arm. "Guv'nor, is that you?" said the man in a cautious voice. "Yes, it's I," he said. "What do you want?"

At the sound of his voice the man uttered an exclamation and tried to free himself; but Rawson Fenton held him tight and dragged him into the faint light that flickered from the lamp of the village inn. CHAPTER XXIII. Rawson Fenton's keen eyes scanned the man's face searchingly. He thought him a tramp at first, but after a moment's examination he saw that the fellow had scarcely the tramp look about him, though he was poorly dressed in a long rough coat, which was stained with rain and mud; his face was unshaven, and still further concealed by a broad-brimmed slouch hat, which at Fenton's strong grasp, he pulled over his eyes.

"Let go, guv'nor," he said, surlily. "Not so fast, my friend," retorted Rawson Fenton. "Have the goodness to remember that it was you who accosted me. May I ask what it is you want?" "That's no business of yours, the man growled. "Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies." "I wonder what you are, my friend," he thought, "and what you are lurking about Brakespear Castle?"

"Good-night," said the man, getting his arm free. "Don't go, my man," he said, smoothly. "I see the village constable standing by the inn there, and I shall be compelled to call him if you attempt to leave me." "I ain't afraid of the bobby," he said, sullenly, but he stood still. "Very good," retorted Rawson Fenton, "then you can have no objection to his being present at our little interview."

"What's your little game, guv'nor?" he demanded, angrily. "I've got no business with you. What do you want with me? Can't you pass the time of night without being took for a thief?" "Not always," was the bland response. "What I want is a little information. I am anxious to know why you stopped at the inn here, and for whom you took me." "It's on business of yours," he said. "No, but I mean to make it. What were you after—here in the park?" "A chap might do worse, guv'nor." Rawson Fenton smiled.

"Is number two. You are no preacher, my friend. You haven't the cut of one. Come, I'm curious, and when I'm curious I am not easily put off. You'll find you'll have to open your heart to me before we part." "I'm curious if I do!" snarled the man. "Who are you, I should like to know?" "I'll tell you," was the calm reply. "My name is Rawson Fenton." The man started, and looked as if thrown off his guard by the announcement. "You know me, it appears, my friend?" he said. "Not I, nor don't want to."

AT R. MCKAY & CO'S. WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 1909. Wednesday Sale of Dress Goods. 1,000 Yards New Spring Dress Materials; Worth Regularly 50c and 75c; Sale Price 29c Yard. Sharp at 8.30 to-morrow morning on sale 1,000 yards of stylish, serviceable and up-to-date dress materials, comprising Hand-finished Serges, Shepherd Checks, Panamas, Tweeds, Voiles, etc. Every wanted shade in the lot, such as navies, browns, greens, fawns, reds, cream and black; some of the season's best regular selling lines. Come early for first choosing. Worth regularly up to 75c, sale price 29c yard.

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