

CONQUEST BY DEFEAT.

By Thos. Swift.
(Continued).
CHAPTER IV.

That night about twelve o'clock a monk from Stanleigh Abbey was admitted within the castle, with an order from Sir Henry Stanleigh to be conducted to the chambers of the Countess of Westmoreland. The heavy bolt shot back, the monk entered with a lamp and the massive door closed again. In the dungeons were the glowing embers of a wood fire, a small table, and a cushion, from which the prisoner rode as the priest entered.

"Then a strange thing occurred. The monk placed the little lamp upon a table. Then two white, shapely hands were raised to the ceiling, and they slid back with such grace as never monk displayed in this life, revealing the pale yet lovely face of Isabel, Countess of Westmoreland. The prisoner was amazed and silent; the visitor silent and self-composed.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" finally asked Sir John in a low tone.

"I had a lock for a different kind of confessor beneath a monk's garb," he answered with gentle sarcasm.

"That you may escape," said Isabel, whipping off the habit with such alacrity that it seemed to slide from her person.

"Here, quick!" she went on, tossing the garments unceremoniously upon the couch. "Don those; it is the longest habit that countess ever had. When you are ready, knock loudly thrice upon the door and push through hurriedly, that the warden may not have time to give eyes to his prisoners, before you are well out of the castle. For the time being, I do not care to win your favor; so do not shame my play. Speed, then, to the Abbey, where Abbot Ambrose awaits you."

She spoke rapidly, not waiting for a reply.

"Sir John did not stir, and there was dead silence.

"Haste, oh, haste!" exclaimed Isabel, excitedly. "The time is flying."

"What mesneth this mummy?" asked Sir John, almost sternly.

"Mummy?" exclaimed Isabel, in great surprise. "It is for you, John. The mummy now upon the wall, and I leave my crown to you. But do haste, John!"

She was trembling now, and the tears were gathering in both eyes and voice; and Sir John had awaited to her pure admiration dwelt in his eyes, but there was a strange, persistent sadness and resolution in his voice.

"Isabel, if this is my only means of escape, then I will accept it here. I will never accept my life from the hands of her who cast me off and assigned my heart to a living death."

This was sweetest music to the woman's ears, for it convinced her that she still had power to move him. "But you will—you will," said she, confidently, and, clasping her hands appealingly, she advanced towards him.

He folded his arms round her across his breast. Isabel's face flushed and her eyes flashed in the dim light.

"I ask nothing; I seek nothing but your safety," she said through her tears, and that it would not accept from you," was the firm reply.

Isabel wrung her hands in despair.

"Put on your borrowed garments once more," she continued, "and let me come to shrieve me. You would not have me die in my sins. This is all I ask of you—all you can do for me."

Isabel gazed at him wonderingly. She had not counted upon such a striking scene. In the castle hall her woman's keen intuition had told her that he still loved her. She had seen it in his first unguarded look. But his subsequent conduct had convinced her that his love in his bitter intensity and unforgiveness, was akin to hate. That he might uphold her or receive her coldly, solemnly, sternly, she had not minded. But that he would refuse to accept life and freedom at her hands and go to a sure and dreadful doom, she had never for a moment contemplated. She was staggered, crushed, upon finding her purpose thus thwarted.

"Yet, should he be saved, she swore to herself, if it cost her life. She loved him fondly, madly, as she had hardly thought herself capable of loving. Her mother's fortune, her consideration of self, went down before his splendid daring of fate and death itself in her "queen's" hall. What she asked herself was, "Did she but compare life with a cause—a lost cause, apparently—for which he was still ready to die the death? For the first time, she rightly understood what this fatal party spirit of the times really meant to every brave and resolute knight in England. When brother fought brother and son slew father, of what account was a weak woman's love?"

She minutes sped on. Yet did she in her character of confessor deem herself safe from intrusion. The man before her must be saved—saved in spite of himself—but how? She would try another plan. If that failed, another; and if that failed she had no other.

"John," she began, and now she was all woman—every tone of her voice breathing passion.

"You love me still?" And she laid her head against his folded arms, but his face grew stern and set.

"You love me?" And her tender eyes sought his.

"Answer!"

"Yes, I love you, Isabel."

The words dropped softly, like dew upon the shining flowers, as it seemed to her, upon her upturned face.

"Yet, strange as it may appear, I hate you also; I cannot feel indifferent to you; would I could!" he ended with a wailing sigh.

"But you would not—read me now?" she asked, in a tremulous whisper.

"No," he answered, fiercely, and moved as though he would shake off her touch.

"I know why," she said, smiling sadly.

"It bores you," he answered, sharply, as if afraid to hear the reason stated.

"It bores me because I am the Countess of Westmoreland, and no longer Isabel Stanleigh—is it not?"

"Yes; if you will have it so."

"But it is not!"

Isabel sighed and stood before him in all her loveliness, her hands clasping his folded arms.

"John, you will do this for me," she said, pleadingly, "in remembrance of

what I might have been to you—if only you had asked me to choose and bid I do. I would not have you in my presence to the red cross, had you asked me. I could not have done otherwise."

For a moment Sir John seemed to relent, and a softer light came into his eyes. Then the lurking demon of obtuseness seized him fiercely again, and he spoke almost harshly.

"I cannot do this—I will not take my life at your hands—urge me no more."

So saying, he turned from the pleading woman and seated himself on the side of his couch, and Isabel knew that the first of her plans had failed.

Then her countenance changed its softness and assumed an expression as dagged and determined as the lightning's.

"Then shall I stay here," she said in low, firm tones, "until—until it is too late—to hide my shame from my father's household."

And, feeling Sir John's disturbed countenance, she laughed a low, soft laugh of heartiest enjoyment. It was the first time she had been able to pierce through the knight's obdurate armor.

"A pretty scandal it will make in my father's house and at court when they become known that the proud and immaculate Countess of Westmoreland visited Sir John Stanleigh, in his dungeon, and shared with him—"

"Cease, Isabel! For mercy's sake, cease!" exclaimed Sir John, strangely moved at the daring yet set purpose of the woman standing before him. "I would not dare to do this desperately. I will not do it."

"Aye, this and more, if you drive me to it," Isabel retorted, scarcely able to keep the ring of triumph out of her voice.

The knight sprang up and, seizing the discarded habit, said:

"Put this thing on, and begone, before it be too late! That sleep you deny me enter at any moment, and you shall rue it, why did I not think of it before?"

"Ah! Why not, indeed?" replied Isabel, coolly seating herself on the opposite couch. "You have no thought for anybody save yourself."

"Isabel," pleaded Sir John, "begone. I beseech you."

"Here I stay," said Isabel, resolutely.

"My life is not at stake,"

"This is madness, Isabel!" exclaimed the knight, and she was a softness, may, tenderness in his voice.

"True; but the madness is yours," was the calm response.

"But, even if I escape—scandal will find you here, and your father will have to give an account of his ward," argued the knight.

"I can take care of myself," replied Isabel, confidently. "When the time comes the warden will not come here to interview one of your trustees—retainers, will have to report to my father, who, I know, will be secretly rejoiced at your escape, and will share the knight's feelings."

"And then, Isabel?" questioned the knight, feelingly.

"I shall have to confess," said she, with a laugh and a blush, "and to fight it out with Her Grace the Queen."

Sir John shook his head, as though not to persue, but she said, "that I Isabel Stanleigh, Countess of Westmoreland, in my father's castle, have sought to dread from you. You are a foreigner, and you are the queen of the kingdom? Has Margaret of Anjou so many supporters that she can afford to lose one such as is Sir Henry Stanleigh?"

Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes were bright and triumphant. At that moment Sir John Stanleigh's obstinate spirit and pride went down before her. The magnanimity of her presence, her passion, her sacrifice of self quite vanquished him, and, without another word, he proceeded to effect the necessary and desirable change of raiment.

"Isabel," he said, and he tenderly knew his own voice, so soft and full of love as it was, "my arm baffle it upon account of this mad adventure I shall never forgive myself." He was standing quite close to her now, his eyes looking straight into hers, with the beautiful light that had been in the eyes of the Abbey garden. Yielding to an overpowering impulse of tenderness, he stretched out his arms to clasp her to him, but, with a quick, agile movement, she slipped his hands.

"No, no," said this woman of purpose. "You do not love me—you have said so. You do not love me—yet, I am here, and I will not exchange my life for yours, and I will not have you die for me."

"I do love you, Isabel. I have never ceased to love you," Sir John replied, honestly, though his voice expressed the gravest disappointment.

"Hush! Be quiet, what you have expressed. Then, he rose, and she drew from the folds of her robe a dagger, knocked thrice upon the dungeon door, thrust the weapon into his hand and handed him the key of the door, drawing the knight's cloak over her shoulders.

"Take the lamp," she whispered, "and stand to the door."

"In a moment the door swung open, and Sir John, with a murmured "Benedicite," quickly slipped through and disappeared in company with the warden.

CHAPTER V.

When stout Dickon entered Sir John Stanleigh's dungeon and beheld the stately form of the Countess of Westmoreland, standing in the weak rays of each morning that stole through of the hole of a window, it would have been an easy task for his fair hand to have overpowered and left him bound hand and foot. Instead of doing so, she scooped him in the blithest manner.

"Right glad am I to see thine honest face, good Dickon."

Dickon rubbed his eyes and stared at her in stupid amazement.

"This woman is not scarcely meant for a fair; so, haste thee to Sir Henry, thy master, and bring him thither with all speed."

"The foul fiend!" began Dickon, finding his voice.

"The Lord ha' mercy!" groaned Dickon.

"That is better—on us all, say I—amen," cried his prisoner. "But, begone, honest Dickon. And, Dickon, as

thou hast been a quiet tongue." This grating sound, suppliant, for Dickon came to be beyond intelligent speech. With another groan he was about to retire, leaving the door open.

"The door, good Dickon—with bolt and bar," again cried his fair tormentor.

Dickon turned and slammed the bolt into its socket, and with Isabel's gleeful laugh ringing in his ears, departed on his unenviable mission.

In about an hour, sent by Isabel under the knight's cloak for the cell was not too warm—the bolt was once more drawn, and Sir Henry Stanleigh, with a low groan, turned the ward-standling behind him.

"Come hither, Dickon," said Isabel. Then turning to her astounded parent, she continued: "Father, I wish to acquit honest Dickon of any mischief, or part in Sir John Stanleigh's case."

Sir Henry was too staggered to understand everything at once, and looked past his daughter towards the couch.

"What, to God's name, meaneth this, Isabel?" he asked.

"He has escaped," Isabel replied simply.

"Dickon, tell thy master what thou knowest—but nobody else, good Dickon."

"May the devil take that accursed monk!" quoth Dickon, in honest indignation.

"Name, Dickon!" exclaimed Isabel.

"Hast thou no more regard for thy master's daughter? I yield myself your prisoner." And this willful woman flung her arms around the good knight, kissed and kissed and hugged him right heartily.

"But let us seek a fairer dungeon," she said.

Sir Henry did not speak, but his perturbed countenance indicated that he was in silence they left the dungeon.

On gaining Isabel's own chamber Sir Henry said, "Once more, Isabel, I beseech thee, explain this unbecomingly unbecoming business."

"Unbecomingly!" exclaimed Isabel, with a flash of her mother's spirit. "It is unbecomingly, then, to save an old friend's life?"

"And the blood rushing to her face, she said, "my father in his face, she asked coldly, "Am I to speak as your child, or as the Countess of Westmoreland?"

"You wayward girl, how canst thou say that?" and in a moment Isabel was locked in her father's arms.

"Father," she said, softly, "once I married to please you. I saved Sir John Stanleigh's life—to please myself."

At an early hour Sir Henry sought the Queen's apartments and craved private audience of her Majesty. This then Dickon, who, six years before, had been arraigned by Lady Hetta, her mother, on the charge of trifling with honest men's affections; but the queen now occupied Sir Henry's seat of authority.

"Margaret lightly," began Margaret lightly, "Why this early visit? And, why this gloomy brow in presence of a victorious queen?"

"Alas, madam, in reply, "my low rank and evidence the state of my mind. I have unpleasant tidings. Sir John Stanleigh hath escaped from his dungeon."

"Oh!" exclaimed Margaret, and her brow grew black and ominous with passion.

Then, beholding the fallen countenance of her host, her mood softened, and she spoke more gently.

"Dickon, the man who had entered Sir Henry Stanleigh's cell, hath done his duty—'I take that I know!'"

"Aye, madam," said the knight more cheerfully. "His escape hath been cunningly effected by the trick of a quiet monk, who, having orders to shrieve the prisoner, exchanged garments with him."

"It is an old trick," Sir Henry, and I fear you know of it, could so easily have been exposed."

Sir Henry did not share in the queen's wonder, but he deemed it prudent not to say so.

"But bring in this traitor monk, that the knight may speak with him, for assuredly, he shall not go unpunished."

The knight opened a door and Isabel, arrayed in all the splendor of the Countess of Westmoreland, and with a low groan, she entered her and stood, she slowly advanced and stood silently before the queen, who, misconstruing the cause of her entrance, this accented her:

"Sweetest, why are you so grateful for my loving attendance; but, for a brief space, we would be alone."

Then, turning to Sir Henry, she asked impatiently, "But when comes this traitor monk?"

"He will, your grace," said Isabel, in low, but firm, audible tones.

"The perplexed queen looked at the princess from daughter to father, and a real spot began to show on each of her pale cheeks.

"It is even as she saith, madam," Sir Henry answered.

"Thou art here!" exclaimed the queen slowly and in wonderment. "A traitor monk that wouldst be, I faith, to shrieve a doomed man!"

No remark more fortunate for the culprit could the queen have made. For, as Margaret saw the blood spread, until forehead, temples and neck were suffused with the warm, generous glow, she realized that her cruel shaft had sped home and her woman's pity and sympathy overcome the queen's feelings of chargin and resentment.

Slowly and with stately grace the dowdcast head was lifted, and Isabel's flashing eyes met sympathizingly the eyes of the queen, and for a moment the two women—each regal in her way—gazed at one another and read each other's hearts.

Then Isabel sank to her knees, saying: "I pray your grace's pardon—may be the penalty."

"Nay, Isabel," replied Margaret, gently. "I think thou art punished enough. Thy face glows with it, and the queenly light in thy heart play the tale. And a Yorkist knight more or less in this day of our triumph boots but little. What say you, Sir Henry?"

"I beg pardon, madam," replied the good knight, "you know my opinion. Mercy winneth more than justice. Such bloody deeds as the playing of the aged Salisbury and the boy Rutland

the other day bode ill for the present attainment of the land."

"Sir Henry had just actively touched a tender spot. The queen's cheeks flushed at the name of the unfortunate Rutland, as if some dim foreboding of the terrible fate of her own handsome stripping of a son, who was child her in art, had touched and she had had a sore grief and shame to her.

"As if anxious to hide her painful emotions she stepped forward and gracefully raised Isabel to her feet, saying: "Now that peace shall once more descend upon our distracted realm, we can ill afford to lose the fairest flower of our court."

Alfred, Duke of York, the son of Edward, Duke of York, who fell at Wakefield, was crowned King of England, and Margaret of Anjou and her son were fugitives in the land.

Sir John Stanleigh, a noble warrior of Yorkist lineage, and a sharer in the late Edward's triumph, wed Isabel, the Countess of Westmoreland, and by his great influence at court, secured Sir Henry Stanleigh from the attainder and ruin.

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ed, "mak' it yerself!" which I immediately did. Although the exorbitant cost of butter made it scarce with me, I managed to get enough for him. He was too ill to take much, but it did me good to see how the poor fellow enjoyed it; all the time he was lying in bed, and I had to go down to the kitchen to get the butter for him. He got better and left us, but had a second attack, and returned to us looking dreadfully ill.

Bartlett, R.H.A., never came. Like the others, when convalescing, he was so anxious to help, saying that as I washed and mended his clothes so well, "I know you will be in the house for the other chaps just come in. We all like to help you." Poor fellow; they are all very young.

6. Sutherland (Scott Grey). He was shot in the mouth, the lips cut, teeth broken, and he lay in bed for three weeks. He had the bullet lodged in his jaw. He munched two days and one night without any dressing or remedy. He told me that during that terrible journey he often dismounted to gather a handful of water, and he was so thirsty that he would have drunk it. He is a most kind-hearted fellow. When he came here he brought a dozen pairs of socks with him, and he gave to the other chaps just come in. He is a most kind-hearted fellow. When he came here he brought a dozen pairs of socks with him, and he gave to the other chaps just come in. He is a most kind-hearted fellow. When he came here he brought a dozen pairs of socks with him, and he gave to the other chaps just come in. He is a most kind-hearted fellow.

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