

empted from duty for awhile, and that he should spend some time as he listed. So the castle grew gay under his government, and hawking and shooting with many a mock tournament and trial of arms, went on. There were few ladies to witness the sports, for now Constance was gone, few cared to travel any distance to visit the stiff and formal lady Ann, who for her part was only too well pleased to be left in peace with her tapestry and her flowers.

How Viscount Regnier first persuaded Isabel to emerge from her retirement, she herself could hardly have told. She was won by his manner into friendliness, almost without her own will. The way in which he treated her was so different to any she was accustomed to meet with—the respectful distance, the distinguishing her from the rest of her father's guests, as though by right claiming greater attention; then, in a solitary walk, Isabel could not avoid overhearing a few sentences of admiration of her fall from Regnier's lips—not the praise of her beauty, which Isabel was accustomed to, and disdained, but of that very haughtiness and cold reserve on which Isabel prided herself, but all the while had an uncomfortable feeling that Mary Thoresby and Walter might have been in the right of condemning. His delicate way of implying how strongly he condemned his father's treatment of her was refreshing to Isabel. A request that she would assist him in tracing the various branches of the house of de Lisle was made and granted, and the employment threw her almost daily in contact with him; and the days he did not come, and she did not see him soon became heavy days to Isabel. Her spirits were oppressed, her heart felt a void. Isabel never paused to inquire its cause, alas! she had lost the habit of questioning and schooling her own heart, and she was unwilling to resume the task.

When Lord Regnier went for a few days at a time to London, Apswell Court seemed to grow intolerably dull, and Isabel's heart rebounded when she heard the clatter in the court yard which announced his return; and each return grew more pleasant, for each brought some new proof of the honor and respect in which she was held, something to give her pleasure was sure to arrive, some new book was laid upon her table, choice flowers were transplanted, that she might admire them. A palfrey was carefully trained for her own use, and Isabel could not refuse to ride her, when she found that part of Lord Regnier's mornings were regularly spent in riding the animal, that he might be sure she was suitable for a lady, and when the choicest falcon was taught to fly from her wrist—Lord Regnier saying, as he presented it, "Rare bird needs care mistress"—could she refuse to join the hawking parties? And if she did stand back at first from acceptance of all these gifts, how humbly and mournfully the Viscount would say he deserved it—he had offered them with all respect, as the rightful due of a deeply injured lady; but if she disdained them, there was no complaint that could be made.

So Isabel went on, and so in the incense to her pride which she daily accepted, what wonder that her head grew dizzy and her eyes were blinded? And thus time passed, and another summer came.

Last summer, and coldly standing aloof to chide, Isabel had watched her brother at the feet of Constance! She had forgotten it now; she forgot to long for news from Walter, for her soul was absorbed in one wild passion.

One morning Isabel sat in the shade of the thick trees: the heavy fragrance of flowers, and the soft lazy hum of a sultry summer day were wafted towards her—a step sounded on the green sward—that step which had gained the power to make Isabel's heart beat; the Viscount stood by her side, but a different expression was on his face—one of pain and disturbance.

"What has happened, my Lord!" exclaimed she hurriedly.

"A letter from my father," answered he, "bidding me to come speedily, since it is her majesty's pleasure that I again depart on foreign service."

It seemed to Isabel as if all her pulses stood still—she could make no answer, and though her lips unclenched, no sound came forth—Regnier was kneeling by her.

"Isabel, you will not let me go alone! you have seen long since that I am a captive at your will—I cannot live without you, Isabel!" What boots it to dwell on these burning words, or how Isabel's mute answer confessed her love? She slept that night the betrothed of Viscount Regnier.

The Earl came home in a few days, and preparations were made for the Viscount's departure. Isabel expressed a wish that there should be little festivity at her marriage, and the request was acceded to, and it was arranged that the rejoicing should only take place among the household. Though aware that there must be a Protestant public ceremony, Isabel was determined on having her marriage privately performed by a priest, and she expressed her intention to Lord Regnier, but it was overruled, it would be impossible to do so without observation, he said, and just at this moment, would bring down disgrace on his head. He could not do it; it would endanger the priest's life as well. It was useless to insist on it, he continued—it could not be done; and if that were the condition of their marriage he must relinquish it, and go alone to a foreign shore—alone to death, for he should never return. Isabel yielded, and stifled the conscience that tried to make itself heard.

Bright was the sunshine that gleamed through the painted window and fell on the pavement of the chapel, as a bridal train was once more gathered there. The bride today looks pale—as white almost as her dress; still, calmly she plights her vows, and, for one life of weal or woe, is bound to Lord Regnier.

Isabel turned to receive the greeting of her father-in-law, but, instead of embracing her, Lord Beauville suddenly stumbled forward, and fell on the ground, while blood gushed from his mouth and nostrils! They raised him up and carried him from the chapel, followed by Isabel, clinging in terror to her husband's arm. At the chapel door were gathered some of the peasants of the estates.

"Blood on a bridal!" whispered one of them to her neighbor: "that bodes no good—see ye, see ye!"

Isabel heard; she looked down, and truly the spotless robe she had chosen for her wedding was sprinkled and spotted with the Earl's blood! A shudder ran through her, unblest, unshriven, she had approached a holy sacrament—approached, perchance to profane it. No time for musings now! They have reached the Earl's chamber, and the physician is vainly endeavoring to staunch the blood that, from the breaking of some internal vessel, was gushing forth. The man, an hour ago, full of strength and energy, lay on his couch dying and unconscious. He opened his eyes at length, one wild stare around—then fixed them on the roof of the room; he struggled for speech, but the crimson tide flowing fast, forbade utterance—a few incoherent words were all the bystanders heard:

"Have mercy, Alice; I did it not—'twas her own choice. They were free—only one day—one hour! Dost hear, Alice?"

They were his last words, and with a groan of anguish Lord Beauville died.

Isabel had heard all, standing petrified by the child of Alice de Lisle, one who had watched her deathbed, had no word of consolation—no prayer for this; she could not bid him, even in that last moment, call upon his God for mercy. Her husband drew her away, and busy hands undid those blood-stained bridal garments, and laid her down to rest. But her brow throbbed, and her heart was sick with terror. There was no peace for her till her husband, after having seen the necessary offices towards his father discharged, came to her and clasped her fondly in his arms. She had not wondered to see him so composed and resolute through the sudden horror, but she expected him to have now poured forth passionate regrets for the loss of a father who had never crossed him, but entertained for

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him the strongest affection. His first words were:

"And you, my fairest one, are countess already;" and he spoke gaily. "No foreign banishment for us now, you shall see your husband sitting in the queen's councils."

Isabel shuddered in his embrace. It was true, however. Strange chances of life! the house she once called her prison was her own—Isabel de Lisle was now Countess of Beauville.

(To be continued.)

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