

HELENA GRAHAM,
—OR—
THE BRIDE'S SACRIFICE.
CHAPTER XII.

Trembling, paralyzed, shrinking with terror and superstitious awe, as she recollected her vision, Jessie stood quivering before that dark, passionate glance. And, glaring upon her with a hatred and jealousy that for the time "swept her soul in tempests," and inspired her with a momentary frenzy, Helena stood transfixed by her wild, fierce eyes. With one glance she took in all her rival's extraordinary beauty, far surpassing even what she feared; and the sight, to her passionate heart, was like oil poured upon flame.

"So!" she hissed at length through her closed teeth, "pretty Mistress Jessie has found a lover during my absence. Girl, take care! You have begun a dangerous game, but the end has not yet come." Her words broke the spell of terror that held Jessie dumb. And now, noticing her disordered attire, and wild, dishevelled hair, she said, in surprise and entreaty—

"Miss Helena, what has happened? What have I done? I did not know you were on the island."

"No, I am aware of that," said Helena, with a hard, bitter laugh. "Oh, it is a wondrous pity I should have come so soon to spoil the sport. You and your dainty lover thought yourselves secure—thought Helena Graham far away. But again I say to you beware, for 'twere better for you to tamper with a lioness robbed of her young than with the passions of this beating, throbbing heart."

She looked like some priestess of doom denouncing upon all mankind as she stood there, with her long black streaming hair, her wild, burning, passionate eyes, her face white, rigid, and ghastly, save where the two purple spots blazed in and out on either cheek.

"O Miss Helena—dear Miss Helena! what have I done? Oh, I never—never meant to offend you, or stand in your path; as heaven hears me I did not! Tell me, only tell me in what I have offended, and I will never do it again!" said Jessie, clasping her hands in increasing terror and child-like simplicity.

"What have you done? Have you really the effrontery to stand there and ask me such a question?"

"Miss Helena, I do not know—indeed, indeed I do not know!" exclaimed Jessie, earnestly.

In all the storm of anger and jealousy that raged in her soul a look of superb scorn curled the lips of Helena.

"You do not know, O wondrous innocence! angelic simplicity! Must I despise as well as hate you? Listen, then, since I must speak my shame, and answer me truly, as you hope for salvation. Promise."

"I promise!"

"Swear to answer me truly, by all you hold dear on earth! by your hopes of heaven!"

"I swear! O Helena, speak!" cried Jessie, wrought up to an agony of terror and excitement by her words.

"Then—and may heaven's heaviest curse fall upon him if I conjecture truly—has Herbert Clifton dared to speak of love to you?"

Pale, trembling, terror-stricken, Jessie's tongue cleave to the roof of her mouth; had her life depended on it, no sound could have escaped her quivering lips.

"Speak, and tell me—speak, for I must know—I have a right to know!" cried Helena, grasping her arm, and setting her teeth hard to keep down the tempest of passion that was sweeping through her soul.

"Oh, spare me—spare me," wailed Jessie, lifting up her pleading hands.

"Dearly, girl! Must I learn the truth from your false heart? Tell me truly, has he dared to speak of love, and have you dared to listen to him? Heavens! will you speak before I am tempted to murder you?"

"Oh, do not ask me—do not ask me!" cried Jessie, in a dying voice, as trembling, fainting, she sank at the feet of her terrible foe.

ROYAL PRETENDERS.—An Eastern paper has gone to the trouble of ascertaining and classifying the current pretenders to European thrones, and finds the material abundant. There are three in France, the grandson of Charles X., the grandson of Louis Philippe, and the son of Louis Napoleon. In Italy, there is Francis II. of the Two Sicilies, knocked on the political scabbard by Garibaldi, in 1860, and three Bourbon lineages for the respective grand duchies of Tuscany, Modena, and Parma. In Spain, there is Alfonso, son of Isabella, and Don Carlos VII. In Germany, Ernest Augustus persists in calling himself crown prince of Hanover, though the kingdom was swallowed by Prussia in 1866.

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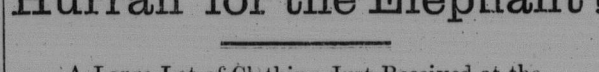
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