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The Imprisoned Heiress

—OR—

The Spectre of Egremont.

CHAPTER XXII.

For several nights after his involuntary declaration of love for Lady Almee, Lord Ashcroft haunted the picture-gallery, but to no effect. The mysterious counterpart of the Lady Jasmine did not appear to him again, nor did he find any token of her presence.

He pondered if he had offended her by his expression of the passion that filled his soul, and if she despised him deeming him false to the Lady Alexina.

He became reserved and silent in the family circle, avoiding tea-table conversations with his betrothed, lest he should strengthen the chain uniting him to her, shunning the affectionate and solicitous attentions of his sister, and spending his time in political discussions with his host, or in gazing upon the restless, ever-changing sea.

Of course, such conduct did not go unremarked. Lady Egremont saw in it the symptoms of love, and in a feeling of delight reminded her husband that she had acted twenty years before, when visiting her ancestral home.

There could be no doubt, she thought, he was in love with the heiress, Lady Alexina, was plagued by the inattention of her betrothed, but the only person grieved by the change in his lordship was the Lady Lorean, who fancied him laboring under the spell of some deadly and potent drug, secretly administered to him by his secret enemy.

The longing grew upon Lord Ashcroft to see Almee again and learn from her that he had not offended her, or else attract pardon of her for the offense he had unwittingly given.

But where should he seek her? The sea was too rough now to admit of his sailing under her windows, and if he could do so he would not be afforded a chance of speaking with her. Besides, the boatman would doubtless make known whatever he might do or say.

Clearly that was impossible. He remembered that she had appeared at the window of the room adjoining the one with closely boarded windows, and it was his belief that she frequented the haunted rooms, and there he would find her.

It was not in his nature to do anything in an underhand manner, and so he shrank at the first thought of seeking an entrance into the closed chambers, but the reflection that Almee might be confined there in wretched, dreary solitude, induced him to consider the subject.

A carelessly uttered remark, one evening when Lady Egremont was speaking of the Lady Jasmine, produced from her the assurance that the haunted rooms had never been occupied since the occurrence of the frightful tragedy, and that they were

now given over to the moth-eaten furniture, and rats, and the apparition of the murdered bride.

"What an abode for that delicate, angel-like girl!" thought Lord Ashcroft, with a shudder.

He pictured her moving about in her quaint attire among those worn-out relics of a terrible past, wringing her little white hands silently, as he had seen her do, and walking vainly to and fro, in the hope of escape from her dreary prison.

From that moment his anxiety and suspense became intolerable.

As Lady Egremont had declared the haunted rooms to be untenanted, he conceived that it could be no breach of hospitality to enter them; and, if it were, why should he blindly adhere to the laws of etiquette when the girl whom he so passionately loved was perhaps languishing in dungeon-like solitude?

His resolution was taken, and he awaited only an opportunity to carry it into effect.

It was repugnant to him to even think of going thither in the night, like a thief, and he determined that, while he must go secretly, it should be in the broad daylight, and as one urged only by curiosity to explore the scene of the Lady Jasmine's murder.

The opportunity was not long wanting. One clear, bright morning—so bright that it seemed spring-like—the Lady Alexina proposed to drive to the town, ten miles away, and the proposition met with general favor. The ladies had some little commissions to execute at the shops, and the gentlemen were only too happy to attend upon them.

Lord Ashcroft desired to remain at home, but while inventing a sufficient excuse his sister came to his rescue. "You don't look well to-day, Lionel," she said, "and I don't believe the drive will do you good. Let me be your physician, and prescribe a morning upon your sofa."

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Those Poor Rich Film Girls

What is the truth about Hollywood, that film city in Los Angeles, the doings of whose inhabitants have raised such a storm of protest from time to time? The inhabitants, of course, are those film stars whose names and faces are as familiar to us as our own, writes Lady Troubridge in "The Mail."

Are they a set of people governed merely by the lust for pleasure which they indulge in at the expense of all laws, social and divine; or are they, as their defenders eagerly tell us, simple, hard-working folk who carry their prayer-books to church before meeting for bathing parties and other innocent pastimes? I have no inside information; my point of view is that of the ordinary woman. But since the cinema has in some form or other come to stay; since it mesmerises our young people and entrances our children, I maintain that these doings in far-away Los Angeles merit the earnest attention of every woman.

It is practically certain that this great Film Colony contains many decent, hard-working people; it is also certain that each year something exceedingly ugly and sinister, if not terrible and vile, rears its head like an unseen monster crouching in that sunlit land.

It is not difficult to see why these things happen. These "stars" are all young. They are, without exception, beautiful or gifted by Nature with faces of extraordinary significance, and they are, so far as those who fill stellar roles are concerned, rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

Men and women usually come into the possession of extreme wealth for two reasons: they make it or inherit it.

If the first, it generally takes years of toil and needs great strength of character. If the second, some sort of training is invariably received.

It is the fashion to sneer at tradition, those faiths and beliefs which are handed down from father to son. Yet the "stars" of Hollywood are living proof that these things are necessary in the lives of human beings, for they are all we have to cling to in moments of stress and conflict, when a quarrel springs up and men and women "see red."

There are fine and great traditions in the United States, but these poor rich people have forgotten or never learnt them. Few of them are ready for the acid test of wealth. The rise has been too sudden.

In Hollywood a penniless girl can walk into a studio and attract the attention of a big producer or casting director by having precisely the face needed for some particular film part, and before thirty months have rolled by she has her jewels, her limousine, her bungalow, her maid, a heaping income, a growing beauty and popularity, and—nothing else.

From early morning to late at night, by means of exercises, massage, and diet and every device known to the beauty parlor, she tries to enhance those charms without which she means nothing, and as her beauty thrives her spirit starves. She has an exquisite house, but it is empty, for no one dwells there. She can fake every emotion, but it is the spirit that quickens. The task becomes more and more difficult without the aid of dope and drink.

The end is not hard to see. His only preparation was to exchange his boots for his slippers, and he then quitted his room, locking the door behind him, that his absence from it might not be detected, and set out ostensibly for the picture-gallery. This room was an upper floor, the same upon which the haunted rooms were situated, but at some distance from the latter. Lord Ashcroft gained it, and spent some moments in contemplating the portrait he so much admired, and he then proceeded through a door at the opposite side of the gallery toward the eastern part of the mansion.

He passed through some moderately wide corridors, from which opened suites of unoccupied rooms, all elegantly furnished, through narrow passages, and a large and lofty chamber, which seemed to have been unused for a century, its furniture being of the style then in use.

From this room he emerged into a passage from which opened the haunted chambers.

This passage was covered with a thick yellow matting, which, although dusty, was evidently now and then swept, and its walls were covered with a gloomy paper, which gave the room a dreary look.

Advancing to the door of the ante-room, the first that attracted his notice, Lord Ashcroft briefly surveyed the passage and the narrow staircase going from it, observing that it was evidently for private use, and then he listened intently for some token of a presence within the chambers.

He had not long to wait, for a sweet sound of a harp's music, low and muffled, stole to his hearing, and he heard also the same sweet voice that had so thrilled him that evening upon the sea.

Surely Almee was within. Eager and excited, Lord Ashcroft waited only for the music to pause, and then he knocked gently upon the door.

He was not heard, and the music commenced again, thrilling him to the soul.

At the first opportunity he knocked a little more loudly. (To be continued.)

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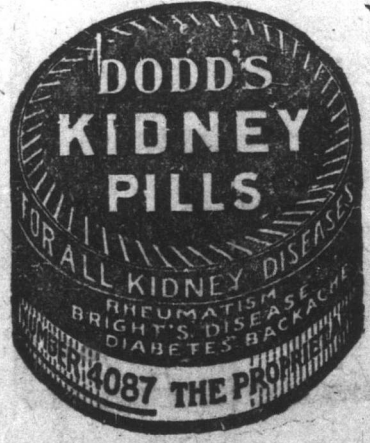
- A Andrews, Miss Mary, Scots Bungalow
B Blackmore, F. J. C., c/o General Delivery
B Baggis, Miss L. M., Hamilton Avenue
B Baker, Miss A., Lime Street
B Barrett, Miss A., Flavin Street
B Bennett, Mr. P., Golf Avenue
B Butt, Mr. B., Nagle's Hill
B Bunney, Miss K., Patrick Street
C Carrroll, Mr. W., Burton's Pond
C Copeland, Miss, Barnes Road
C Corbett, Miss B., c/o General Delivery
C Courage, J. R., c/o General Delivery
C Costello, Mr. R., Water Street
D Dae, Master B., Waldegrave Street
F Fleming, Chas., LeMarchant Road
F Fouer, Miss Magie, c/o gen. Delivery
G Gard, G. B., c/o General Delivery
H Harte, Mrs. Jas., Duckworth Street
H Halbot, Miss K., Princes Street
H Haggitt, Mrs. A., Newtown Road
H Hammond, Mrs. N., Pleasant Street
H Hynes, Mr. Jas., Bunsick Street
H Huston, Mr. & Mrs. J., Pleasant St.
K Kean, Mr. R., Allendale Road
K Kennedy, Rich., G. Street
K Kelley, Mrs. M. N., c/o Poor Asylum
K Kelley, Miss F., Duckworth Street
K King, Levi, c/o G. P. O.
L Lethbridge, Mr. E., c/o Ayre & Sons
M Malloy, Miss M., Circular Road
M Marbin, Miss L., Allen Square
M Miller, W. H., G. P. O.
M Mills, Walter, G. P. O.
M Miller, Miss A., Carter's Hill
M Murray, Miss K., Duckworth Street
M Murphy, Leo, (late) Placentia
N Newall, Miss E., Gower Street
N Neworthy, Mrs. E. W., St. John's
N Neworthy, Miss L., King's Bridge Rd.
O O'Reilly, W. J., c/o G. P. O.
P Parsons, Miss C., Water Street
P Penney, Miss W., Charlton Street
P Peddie, Mrs. Wm., Power Street
P Peddie, Mr. Mark, G. P. O.
P Pike, J. A., Water Street
P Pinsten, Miss M., Hamilton Street
P Porter, Mr. Geo., Bond Street
P Puddister, Mrs. Mary E., Corner Prince Street
R Randall, Miss Dillah, Cochrane St.
R Ryan, Miss Aggie, LeMarchant Road
R Reid, Mr. H. H., c/o General Delivery
R Reader, Mr. Elijah, c/o G. P. Office
S Scott, Mr. E., Allendale Road
S Squires, Mr. Jas., Angel Place
T Tobin, Mrs. M., New Gower Street
W Warren, Miss C., Leslie Street
W White, A., Cabot Street
W Whitelev, Ed. F., Gower Street
W White, Miss P., Barnes Road
W Whitehead, Mr. C., Pine Street
W Woodridge, M., Water Street
Y Yetman, Mr. Ed., General Delivery

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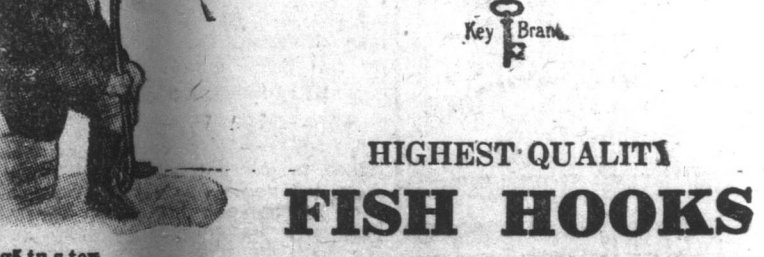
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