



## WHEN LOVE Came Too Late.

CHAPTER IX.

"The Bird is Netted."

"Well, you see, he's the sort of man you do learn to know quickly; so—so frank."

"Frank!" with a smile.

"Well," he stammered, "not exactly frank, but—"

Olivia laughed.

"Never mind," she said. "What you mean to say is that you admire him very much, and that, like papa, you have taken to him."

"That's it," said Bertie, with a sigh of relief. "So the squire likes him, does he? Well, I'm not surprised. I hope they'll be great friends. He'll cheer the squire up, and he wants it, dear old squire."

Olivia turned to him with anxious eagerness.

"Then you have noticed that papa has been dull and low-spirited lately?" she said.

"Yes; I—I don't think he has been quite up to his usual form. He looks bothered and worried about something," said Bertie. "But don't be uneasy, Olivia; it can't be anything serious. What could trouble him?"

Olivia looked vacantly at the feathers nodding in Aunt Amelia's hat. "I don't know of anything," she said, thoughtfully. "No, there can be nothing. What is Mr. Faradeane going to recite to-night?" she asked, after a pause.

"I haven't the least idea," replied Bertie. "He has said nothing to me about it. Whatever it is will sure to be well done, you may depend. Here we are."

The entertainment had evidently been regarded as an event of some importance, for there was a tolerably long string of carriages at the door, and Olivia, as she entered the schoolroom on Bertie's arm, saw that the place was crammed. Their appearance was the signal for a burst of clapping and stamping, and passing up a narrow lane between the chairs, they made their way to the platform amid a hearty welcome.

Aunt Amelia, "all becks and nods and wreathed smiles," ushered them into chairs—all except Faradeane, who took his seat in a corner among the audience—and the performance was proceeded with.

It was like the usual village entertainment. There was the church choir with a part song—sung by half a dozen girls and young men, the former all giggles, the latter all hands and feet. Then the vicar, with a vacuous smile, obliged with a solo on the concertina—by no means badly played; and Faradeane would have enjoyed it if the worthy man had not opened his mouth at all the high notes, and frowned terribly at all the

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low ones. Then a pale young lady sang a sentimental ballad in a voice which only reached the first two rows of chairs; and, following her, a pale young gentleman, with narrow shoulders, growled out "The Village Blacksmith."

The audience, gentle and simple, applauded everything vociferously, and when the pale young lady forgot her words, applauded louder than ever. A lady and gentleman sang the "Glou Glou" duet, which, though they had practiced it, say, two hundred times, was not quite in tune even then; and then the vicar, adjusting his eyeglasses, announced that Mr. Faradeane had kindly consented to give them a recitation.

Every eye turned upon the handsome, grave-faced man in the corner, and Olivia's among them.

He rose, amid the stamping and clapping which welcomed every announcement, and slowly and unobtrusively mounted the platform.

For a moment he looked round, as if to ascertain the size of the room. Then, in low, but clear tones, said, "The Dream of Eugene Aram."

Everybody knows the poem. It is the best of Tom Hood's, far and away, and he was a poet of no mean order. It is the confession of a murder made to a schoolboy by the usher, who pretends that he is only telling a dream, whereas he is really giving every detail of his crime, and the remorse that haunts him.

Faradeane began, in a light tone that reached the remotest corner of the room, to describe the school and the boys, and then gradually, and yet as it seemed suddenly, to assume the character of the murderer, upon whose conscience the crime rides so terribly that he feels constrained to confess it.

Gradually the voice grew deeper, graver, more intense; and as he approached the verse which tells of the crime, the silence in the crowded room was intense. Step by step the confession proceeded, until it reached the point where the murderer in vain endeavors to conceal the body of the man he has slain, and at this point the voice, the gesture, the very face of the reciter were so awful that a shudder ran through the audience, and from the center of the room a woman's sobs rose audibly.

Olivia sat, her eyes fixed on Faradeane's face, her heart almost motionless. She had seen good actors in their strongest characters, but she had seen nothing more terrible than this "Dream of Eugene Aram" as recited in the village schoolroom.

Every now and then a thrill of horror shot through her; then, as the guilty man told of the remorse that haunted him as he stood among the school children, all so pure and innocent, and tried, unavailingly, to join in their evening prayers and hymns, she felt the tears rise to her eyes, and a big lump grow in her throat.

The effect was awful, and when, in his ordinary tone, the reciter wound up with the lines which record the arrest of the guilty usher, she sank back with a sigh of pity and relief. For a moment or two the audience stared at the reciter, at this stranger with the handsome face and sad, dark eyes, in awful silence; then Lord Carfield broke the spell by a vigorous clapping of hands, and amid a storm of applause, Mr. Faradeane, with a faint smile, stepped quietly and slowly from the platform.

As he did so he glanced—was it by accident?—toward Olivia.

She met his glance for a moment, then lowered her eyes, and turned to speak to the vicar, who, worthy man, was sitting with his hands clasped on his knees, and his eyes and mouth wide open.

"My dear Miss Vanley," he gasped, "what an exciting recitation! I—I don't think I ever heard anything more—more terrible. Mr. Faradeane—"

"Faradeane," said Olivia.

"I beg your pardon—Faradeane—is a most accomplished actor, most accomplished."

"Oh, thank you so much, so very much," murmured Aunt Amelia, jerking her feathers at Faradeane. "It was wonderful, perfectly wonderful. I was never so horrified in my life! Why, it has made our poor little entertainment quite distinguished! How could you do it?"

"It is not very difficult," said Mr.



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Faradeane, with a smile. "You are all too good-natured, Miss Vanley," and he sank into his corner and was hidden from the curious and awe-struck gaze of the audience.

The entertainment proceeded; but after the event of the evening, the part songs and duets fell flat, and the big audience dispersed, thinking and talking of nothing but "The Dream of Eugene Aram" and the strange gentleman who had made them shudder and turn pale.

As the Grange party left the room, Lord Carfield came up.

"Where is your friend, Mr. Faradeane, Bertie?" he asked. "I wish you would introduce me. I never heard Hood's poem better done."

Bertie, who had Olivia on his arm, looked round and beckoned to Faradeane.

"My father," he said, "wants to know you, Faradeane."

Mr. Faradeane came forward and bowed.

The old earl looked at him with a rather puzzled expression.

"Haven't I seen you before, Mr. Faradeane?" he said.

Faradeane looked him steadily in the face.

"I think not, Lord Carfield," he said. "No! That's strange. I had a fancy that we had met before this. Allow me to thank you for an intellectual treat. Your recital of 'Eugene Aram' was remarkably good; remarkably good. I never heard it better done, never."

Mr. Faradeane smiled.

"There are hundreds of people who could do it better, Lord Carfield."

"I dare say," said his lordship, "but I have never heard them. It made me shudder; but that is the effect you wanted to produce, no doubt. What amazes me, though, is how a man who hasn't committed a murder—I don't suppose that you have, Mr. Faradeane?" Faradeane smiled strangely. "What astonishes me is how a man who hasn't slain a fellow-creature could portray the feelings of the criminal so closely as you have done."

"It's all trickery, Lord Carfield," said Faradeane.

"Oh, of course," said Bartley Bradstone, who was standing near, and listening with a moody bitterness. He had been watching Olivia during the whole of the recital, and had remarked, with furious jealousy, the effect produced on her. "It's just a knack," he said.

Lord Carfield turned to him with that slow, calm regard which always drove Bartley Bradstone half mad.

"Mr. Bradstone is quite right," said Faradeane, and the pleasant assent chafed Bradstone still more than Lord Carfield's cold glance.

"We'd better be going, hadn't we?" he said, and almost pushing past Bertie, he offered Olivia his arm.

As she put her hand upon it, he felt that she was trembling, and looked at her with an ugly red glowing in his face.

"This confounded business has frightened you!" he said, almost loud enough for Faradeane to hear.

"In my opinion, that kind of thing isn't fit for a mixed audience."

"I am not frightened, thanks," said Olivia, coldly.

"You are trembling, then," he said, with barely suppressed fury.

Olivia looked at him very much as Lord Carfield had looked, and taking her hand from his arm, turned to Miss Amelia. "Are you ready, Aunt?" she said, and waited until she came up to her.

Bartley Bradstone bit his lip at this distinct rebuke, and was forced to walk down the room alone.

As he approached the door, chafing with envy and mortification, a lad entered, and, looking round, came up to him with a telegram.

"What's this?" demanded Bartley Bradstone, roughly.

"A telegram, sir," the lad said. "The postmaster said I was to bring it here, as it might be important."

"He is a fool," said Bartley Bradstone. "Besides, a telegram at this time!"

"I had to ride over with it from Wainford, sir," said the lad, shyly; "and I didn't like to come in till the entertainment was over."

Bartley Bradstone opened the envelope, scowling, and read the telegram. It ran thus:

"Have got all you want. The bird is netted.—Mowle."

He crushed it in his hand, and looked furtively round as if he almost suspected that the rest of the party knew its purport; then his face cleared, and he glanced at Olivia with an ugly smile of sinister significance.

"You snub me, do you, my lady?" he said, under his breath. "You'll change your tone presently, I fancy."

And he went into the open air mumbling the words of the telegram.

"Mowle's a fool to send such a wire," he said, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "But he's right. The bird is netted!"

CHAPTER X.

In The Moonlight.

When they came out of the schoolroom into the open air, the moonlight was streaming over the pastoral scene, lighting up the crowd of people still talking of the wonderful "Dream of Eugene Aram," as they made their way through the string of carriages.

Faradeane paused to say good-night; but Aunt Amelia would not offer her hand.

"My dear Mr. Faradeane!" she exclaimed, "surely you would not leave us! Bertie, the squire quite expects you back to smoke a cigar with him; do, do persuade him to come with you. Really, I feel that I cannot lose you, Mr. Faradeane."

Faradeane hesitated; but Bertie, eager to snatch a few more minutes of his idol's society, pressed his arm.

"Come on," he said. "The squire will be pleased, I know."

Olivia stood silent, her eyes fixed dreamily on the moonlit scene.

"Must we go back in those stuffy carriages," she said, in a low voice. "Can we not walk, aunt?"

"Certainly, you may," replied Miss Amelia. "But I think I will ride; these night dews are rather treacherous, I'm sure," and she dropped her head on her shoulder, and simpered. "Mr. Bradstone will be kin enough to take care of me."

Bartley Bradstone's face would have supplied a fine study for a painter of character, but he was helpless; and with a stifled oath, gave her his arm. (To be Continued.)

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## War News

Messages Received Previous to 9 A.M.

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